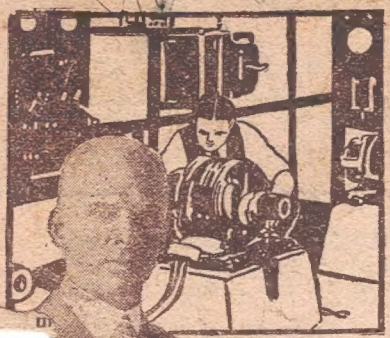
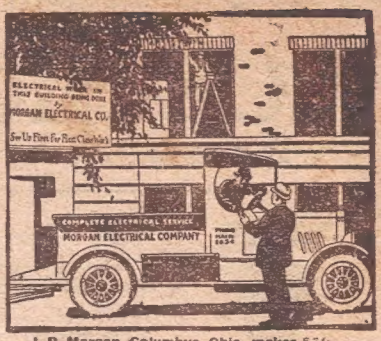


Herbert Dickerson, Warrenton, Va., makes $7,500 a year

Automotive Electricity pays W. E. Pence, Albany, Oregon, over $9,000 a year



J. R. Morgan, Columbus, Ohio, makes $20 to $50 a day in business for himself

Electrical Experts Are in Big Demand

I Will Train You at Home To Fill a Big Pay Job

$500 Cash To Go Into Business for Yourself

Every month I give two of my students $500 cash, to go into business for themselves. No strings attached—an out and outright gift. Get details of this remarkable offer,—the most amazing offer ever made in the home-study field from my big free book.

It's a shame for you to earn $15 or $20 or $30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert you could make $70 to $200—and do it easier—not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the big electrical industry.

Be an Electrical Expert

Earn $3,500 to $10,000 a Year

Today even the ordinary electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" the ordinary Electricians—to boss the Big Jobs—the jobs that pay $3,500 to $10,000 a Year. Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs." Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home Study Course—now.

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need, and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is simple, thorough and complete, and offers every man, regardless of age, education, or previous experience the chance to become an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

Five Working Outfits—No Extra Charge

With me, you do practical work—at home. You start right in after your first few lessons to work at your profession in the regular way and make extra money in your spare time. For this you need tools, and I give to you five complete outfits.

Your Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too can get into the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid to me in tuition, if when you have finished my course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made, and back of me in my guarantee, stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a million dollar institution, thus assuring to every student enrolled, not only a wonderful training in Electricity, but an unsurpassed Student Service as well.

Get Started Now—Mail Coupon

I want to send you my Electrical Book and Proof Lessons both Free. These cost you nothing and you'll enjoy them. Make the start today for a bright future in electricity. Send in Coupon—NOW.

L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer,
CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS
2150 Lawrence Avenue Dept. 145 Chicago, Ill.

Use This Coupon Now

L. L. COOKE, Dept. 145
2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago

Send me at once your big free book and particulars of your home-study course in Electricity, including your outfit, employment service and $500 cash awards.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation .....

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

Twice-a-Month—Out on the 3rd and the 18th

ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE

W. M. CLAYTON, *Publisher* HAROLD HERSEY, *Editor*

A CLAYTON MAGAZINE

The Clayton Wedge on a Magazine Guarantees:

That the stories therein are clean, interesting, vivid; by leading authors of the day and purchased under conditions approved by the Authors' League of America;

That magazines bearing this mark are manufactured in Union shops by Americ workmen;

That each newsdealer and agent is insured a fair profit;

That an intelligent censorship governs their advertising pages.

Vol. XXIX FIRST MAY NUMBER No. 1

One Complete Novel

THE BRAND BLAZER.....Charles Francis Coe 19
When a man like Wid Samuels meets up with trouble and treachery something is bound to happen.

Twelve Short Stories

COWBOYS AMUCK.....Charles W. Tyler 3
Baldy Sours and his pals drift into the town of War Dance a-lookin' for an outlaw gent.

BLISTERING WIRES.....Ray Nafziger 12
The Hooker Bros. install a telephone and the wires begin to cross, burn and short-circuit.

THE "OBJECTION" LESSON.....Clee Woods 55
Stub and Scoops and Hutch decide to give a tenderfoot a lesson in cow-country manners.

THE POWDER PUFF.....Bud Jones 60
The Blowback Kid, famous fight manager, undertakes the training of a college lad.

CAJAN PETE, BAD HOMBRE.....Ripton Croy 71
Cajan Pete busts out laughin' when the sheriff sticks a gun into his ribs.

REFUGE THAT FAILED.....Johnston McCulley 78
Henry Korl was a murderer and fugitive from the law and sought the only protection he knew in the Northwoods Country.

THE TEXAN.....Robert Roy 85
The Texas Rangers offer a good training for a man as this story proves.

A FIGHTING CHANCE.....Edgar Daniel Kramer 94
The enmity of two badmen and Fate conspire to make a most dramatic tale of the frontier.

THE TRAP.....Richard Hill Wilkinson 99
Jed Anderson had felt the force of Pete Fergason's Colt .45 once too often.

AN OLD DOG'S NEW TRICK.....George A. Wright 105
Tricks is tricks and the sheriff got caught, but his deputy was also tricky.

MONKEY-BUSINESS.....Edgar K. Daniel 109
A monkey may imitate a man's actions, but he seldom winds up in the same way.

OLD BILL SEES A REAL ONE.....Culpeper Chunn 113
Old Bill of the Come Back Saloon is a dearly beloved character whose actions always provide a good laugh at his expense.

One Serial Novel

VANISHING HERDS.....Grant Taylor 120
A Five-part Serial of Western Adventure—Part Four

One Special Feature

THE COUNTRY STORE..... 134
If you want to exchange something you have but don't want for something you want that someone else has, here is the place to do it.

Yearly Subscription $4.00 This Issue Dated May 3, 1926 Single Copies 20 Cents

Issued semi-monthly by Readers' Publishing Corporation, 799 Broadway, New York. Harold Hersey, President; William E. Harrs, Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter July 8, 1921, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under act of March 3, 1879. Title registered as a Trade-Mark in the U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1926, by Ace-High Magazine. Member Newsstand Group: Men's List—For advertising rates apply to E. R. Crowe & Co., Inc., New York, 25 Vanderbilt Ave.; Chicago, 225 N. Michigan Ave.

COWBOYS AMUCK

By Charles W. Tyler

Baldy Sours an' his pals drift into the town of War Dance a-lookin' for a outlaw gent. War Dance is so mean an' onery there ain't a man died a nat'chal death in that kermoonity for thutty year. Holy horntoads, is they anythin' them cowboys wishes harder than that they hadn't come after they arrives? Shore, before it's all over they wishes powerful hard they could only *leave* the place.

A GOOD man ain't ever licked until they put a lily in his hand. That's the first time he'll admit there's anybody got the best of him.

There's only one way to find out how good you are, and that is to take a crack at the cock-eyed world every time you can pick a fight with the old stiff. Fog up the scenery, and go out with your boots on if you have to. There ain't nothin' to sittin' on the curb with the squaws, watchin' the parade go by. Two kinds of folks are satisfied with things as they are—the nuts and the dead.

That's what I been tellin' Baldy Sours an' Texas Joe right along.

"What is the sense of bein' like some birds?" I says. "There is ginks that croak on their feet, an' then keep on walkin' around because it's cheaper than havin' a funeral."

"*You* won't never finish on your feet, simple," says Baldy Sours, crabbed. "One of these bright, fair mornin's some hombres are goin' to hang you to a telegraft pole. There will be one slight difficulty, an' that's fixin' the noose so's it won't slip over your darned pin head. Your ears is all you got above yuh neck. Yes, sir."

"Ye kin throw talk till yuh air as black in the face as Friday night," butts in Texas Joe, snortin'. "I ain't goin' lookin' fer no dad-busted, whoopity-blank outlaws if they're fetchin' a million dollars a head.

This is the only hide I got, an' I don't want it all perkorated with size forty-five caliber holes. Mm-uh!"

The argument commenced when I seen a sign posted that offered a reward for a outlaw known as the "Buzzard." There wa'n't no picture because nobody had ever been able to take it yet, and not a very good description. But it says that he could be redeemed for twenty-five hundred dollars if he was delivered to the sheriff's office in a dead condition. But if he was still alive enough to want to hire a lawyer, why, they wouldn't only give fifteen hundred for him.

All I could make out was the county figgered this here Buzzard would be cheaper to handle if he was deceased, on account all they would have to do would be bury him. Otherwise he'd have to be tried before a jury of his peers, an' rope bought, not to mention plantin' him to boot. Then there was the trouble of boardin' an' roomin' him durin' the prologue.

I figgered we could use twenty-five hundred bucks swell, an' there wouldn't be no harm in lookin' around for this here Buzzard a little anyhow. We might get him, an' we might not. But you'd thought I was askin' 'em to join the army, to hear Baldy an' Texas Joe holler when I showed 'em how we could earn a lot of money, fair to middlin' easy.

"That bird is batty as a loose heel!" yelps Baldy, pointin' at his old bald koop an' wagglin' his finger in a circle. "Cuckoo! Peanit butter—a little soft. He ought to be put in a bug-house with the rest of the squirrels."

"Feller," says Texas Joe, drawlin', "don't ye try to wrangle us into another of yuhr dog-gone ijees or I'll drape a monkey-wrench over yuhr ole nut. Ye had me an' Baldy in a muss at Old Hat, ye liked to got us snuffed at Bull Frog, ye hazed us in a dog-gone stampede at Ora Hanna, an' yuh batted us all over the sky in a ole gas crate at Lost Waggin. Now yuh lay off. I got all the hoot-blatted trouble I want without goin' out in the desert lookin' fer some more."

Well, we argued pro an' contrary for a while, an' then they begun to weaken. I knew Baldy was mullin' it over pretty serious when he went out an' begun kickin' the tires on our old Liz, figgerin' how far they'd take us before we has to start runnin' on the rims. When he come back he was rollin' hisself a cigarette, an' there was a far-away look in his eyes.

"When le's go?" he says.

We had been up Garfield way, sort of prospectin' around for a job of work. Like Texas Joe says, it was risky business—somebody might hire us. But they didn't, so all we had to do was wind up the flivver an' head out.

This Buzzard hombre was a sure-enough tough Aleck. He had quite a gang, an' they had been stickin' up trains an' robbin' gold shipments an' payrolls, not to mention droppin' a gent here an' there whenever they felt a little extra onery. They was a mighty bad outfit to tangle with, an' a whole lot hard to locate. When the sheriff's posse gets too close they holes up in Hell's Garden.

Hell's Garden has got a rock formation for pretty near every critter on four legs, or two. There is spires, an' bald domes, an' deep slashes. Giants, tin soldiers, rockin' horses, old squaws hunched in their blankets, solemn sentinels, tall ghosts with wide-brimmed hats—wind and erosion has been carvin' in Hell's Garden ever since the beginnin'. An' the color is vermillion red. There ain't no grays or browns or yellers—just red, flamin' red.

Comin' down the road from the north, me an' Baldy an' Texas Joe leave the main trail an' swing in along the west frontier of Hell's Garden. It was a short cut to War Dance anyhow. We stop where we get a good view, an' you'd swear some of them walls was tongues of flame, leapin' up from the bowels of the earth.

After about five minutes, just sittin' an' lookin', Baldy takes a long breath. "If that's the kind of country this here Buzzard holes up in he ain't never goin' to be bothered by me none. I wouldn't go into that place if he only lived around the first turn to the right."

"Bohy, howdy!" says Texas Joe. "I've heerd of Hell's Kitchen, an' Hell's Half Acre, an' Hell's Bells, an' all them places,

but this yere gardin freights the blue ribbon. Come on, le's go. I don't want to be here after the sun sots an' some of them shapes starts foragin' 'round. It's mighty danged queer even now."

We bumps along to War Dance, feelin' relieved to get away from that blazin' region where the Devil grows his oats. The Buzzard, it looked, had picked a place right close to home.

It was dusk when we come to War Dance. I don't know what they called it that for, but it's a good name. There is about twenty-thirty houses where folks live, an' as many more that the winders has been busted out of. The old saloons has all been boarded up. There is a blacksmith shop an' garage, a couple hotels an' the ruins of a church.

The saloons an' church all bein' on the blink, why, it looked like the Devil an' the Lord had fought a draw in War Dance.

One of the hotels is a long, low buildin' with a false front. On this it says in big letters, which we can just make out in the fadin' light: "Mike Grommet. Eating Place. Saloon."

Well, we went into Mike's place, an' there was a lot of fellers sittin' around smokin' an' chewin' the rag, but what made me an' Baldy an' Texas Joe stare was a big, polished bar an' two fat barkeeps settin' out bottles of whiskey just like old times.

"Holy cow!" gasps Baldy. "A saloon doin' business two hundred miles north of the Mex border. What do yuh know about that?"

Texas Joe, he begun to drool at the mouth as he read the signs about all the good old booze they used to have. "Looks like a barroom," he says, "smells like a barroom, an' I'll be a cock-eyed son of a fish if I don't think it *is* a barroom."

An' it was.

We sneaks into a seat at a table where an old bird with whiskers is sittin'.

"Howdy do," I says.

He looks at us curious, one at a time, an' finally grunts, "Howdy."

"Nice day," I says.

"Hey," says Baldy in a low voice an' jerkin' his head toward the bar, "ain't they heard about prohibition out here yet?"

The old feller nods. "Oh, yass, we heerd on it. Yass, s'ree. But Mike hain't." An he crooks his thumb toward a big, burly hombre who's leanin' against the bar smokin' a stogie.

"How's that?" I says.

The old feller spits in a box of sawdust, an' wipes off his beard. "Mike thar," he says, "is deef as a post. Besides, he kain't read a word. Naw, s'ree, nary word. How the hell would he know the kentry had dried hup?"

Baldy took off his hat an' begun scratchin' his head; then he looked at Mike Grommet, an' then at Whiskers. "Ain't the sheriff liable to show up an' raid the dump?" he says in an awed voice.

The old feller sort of chuckled. "Wal, I'll tell ye," he says after a spell, "hit's like this. Our town is two hun'erd mile from the county seat. Two hun'erd mile. Yass, s'ree. Wouldn't hardly pay a man to come way out hyar jist to make trouble fer Mike, Mike bein' a cripple, ye might say, an' desarvin' of pity. 'Twouldn't hardly pay. Naw, s'r!"

"I dunno," says Baldy doubtful, "but them birds wax pretty flip, take with them big cars they drive nowadays. Two hundred miles ain't so far, when yuh come to think of it, mister."

The old gent chews away steady for a couple of minutes; then he says, meditative-like, an' screwin' up his eyes: "Last sher'ff as come to War Dance nosin' 'round—he's here yit."

"Yuh mean he's livin' here?" says Baldy.

"Yass, s'ree," says whiskers. "Some of our public speerited ceetizens dug him a home."

"Whistlin' Rufus!" breathes Texas Joe, shrinkin' down in his chair. "What kind of a town is this?"

"Ain't any of the prohibition fellers ever bothered you?" I says.

"Naw-w," says the gent, disdainful. "Reckon they kain't find War Dance. Prob'ly never heerd on it. Hain't no pilgrims peltin' through yere likes they is to Needles an' Searchlight. We're a peaceful, law-abidin' kermoonity."

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world," agrees

Baldy, rubbin' his chin an' watchin' around him, half scared-like.

"Naw-w, s'ree," states the old bird, pullin' his whiskers, "none of them Guvermunt agents come 'round yere. If any officers come to town, d'ye know what would happen to 'em?"

"No," says Baldy hoarse-like. "What?"

"Why," says the gent, "Bowie Bill an' Six-gun Sam an' Sidewinder Smith an' a couple others would put a hackamore on the feller, an' tie a sack over his eyes, an' saddle him, an' bridle him, an' ride him down the ro'd, spurs an' quirt jist a-flyin'."

Baldy looks at Texas Joe, an' Texas Joe looks at Baldy, an' then they both look at me to see if I'm hearin' the same lines as they are. Finally Texas Joe says: "Man, what an ideal home life."

The old feller grunts. He turns his gimlet eyes from Baldy to Texas an' then to me. Finally he asks: "What mought you-uns' biznuss be?"

"We ain't got no business," I says. "We're cowboys."

Just then Mike Grommet ambles up an' taps Baldy on the shoulder, at the same time jerkin' his thumb at the bar.

Baldy scrambles to his feet, an' he says, "I don't care if I do."

"Hey, he ain't invitin' ye to drink," says the old gent with the whiskers. "He's tellin' ye that it's about time ye sot 'em up—or out ye go."

"Or out we go," echoes Texas Joe. Then he says: "Gents, shuffle forrard."

Well, we lined up an' snuffs a round of Mule-eye. I seen better licker, an' I seen worse. We hadn't expected to run into no cheer like this, so we plants another slug. Meantime old whiskers lets down a little an' shakes out his tongue. His name is "Bowie Bill," an' he seems to take a likin' to me.

"What did ye say yore biznuss wuz?" he says, leanin' up close so's I could tell him confidential.

"I didn't say—yet," I says.

Then he looks all around as sly as dealin' off the bottom of the deck, an' he whispers, "Hit's all right, podner. Ye an' yore frien's air safe as a wick in taller. Hain't two gents in yere that the sher'ff wouldn't like fer to throw down on."

"You don't mean badmen?" I whispers, thinkin' of the Buzzard an' Hell's Garden up around Broomstick Butte.

"Yass, s'ree," says Bill, clampin' his jaws together, winkin' firm an' jerkin' his head down with a snap. "Thut's jist whut, bub. Bad hombres. Hoss thiefs, train rubbers, claim jumpers, two-gun gents with notches on their ironware. Heeled. Shoot ye as quick as they'd look at ye. See thut thur stain on the floor? Bl-l-ood! Hain't a man died a nat'rul death in War Dance fur thutty year."

Holy Joe!

It stood to reason that War Dance must be one gosh-awful tough town, or Mike Grommet wouldn't get away with this here barroom in his hotel, even if he was deef an' couldn't read. An', bein' bad that-away, it stood to reason that rustlers an' train robbers an' gun gents would drift here natural. War Dance was the back door to the Desert of Fire, an' the front door to Hell's Garden. All the maps I'd seen showed it as "abandoned," so there wa'n't many folks goin' to travel through a hundred miles of hot sand an' lava beds just to look it over.

Likewise, if a sheriff did head into the Desert of Fire there'd be forty gents to pass the word, an' Mike could be closed up tighter'n a spiggot in a keg before the law come within five miles of War Dance. Yuh might be s'rprised, but news has got a way of ramblin' in the desert that is just plumb remarkable, no less.

Anyhow, I could seen that strangers wa'n't popular in War Dance, an' to hit high sassiety a feller should ought to have killed somebody or robbed a train, or somethin'. Mike Grommet kept watchin' us like we was the twelve apostles. I begun thinkin' up a scheme so's we'd fit in good with the fellers at War Dance, on account of we might be hangin' around quite a while, tryin' to get a look at the Buzzard.

Pretty soon I got a swell idea. I didn't have no chance to tell Baldy an' Texas Joe about it, an' them dumb-bells prob'ly would said it wa'n't no good anyhow.

While Baldy an' Texas Joe is punishin' some more Mule-eye, I takes old Bowie Bill to one side an' whispers in his ear.

"You know that gent you was standin' next to?" I says.

"Yass," says Bill, squintin' toward Baldy.

"You know who he is?" I says.

"Hain't got the slightest ijee," says old Bill. "Who izze?"

"That's 'Dirk' Abbey," I says. "I'd keep away from him while he is lickerin'," I says. "He's liable to start prospectin' you with a knife. He carved three fellers up to Garfield night before last. He can stand a knife in your ribs from clear across the room.

"Thut bal'-haided hombre?" says old Bill.

"That's the bird," I says.

"The son-of-a-gun," says Bill, eyein' Baldy respectful.

"An' you see the tall rangy cuss beside him?" I asts the old gent with the whiskers.

"Yass," says Bill, his voice droppin'.

"You know who he is?" I says.

Bowie Bill shakes his head. "Nope. Never seed him afore ez I kin recollict."

"That's 'Hair-trigger' Yazoo," I says. "He sprinkles lead just as common as eatin' beans with a knife. He's plumb bad. Got a six-shooter up each sleeve right now."

"Ha'r-treeger Yazoo," murmurs old Bill, combin' his beard with his fingers. "Ye don't tell. Tch, tch."

I could seen I'd got the old gent with the whiskers goin'. He couldn't take his eyes off Baldy or Texas Joe. Pretty soon he moves over to where Mike Grommet is leanin' on the end of the bar. Bowie Bill taps Mike on the shoulder, an' when he's got the attention of this here Grommet bird he commences to throw sign language.

Baldy has placed his old sombrero on the bar, an' you could seen his old bald koop glistenin' in the kerosene lamplight half a mile. Bowie Bill rubs his hand all over the top of his head; then spreads his hands, an' rubs his head an' spreads his hands. Mike is watchin' him, his little beady eyes glistenin' like a hawk's. Mike nods, an' old Bowie Bill points at Baldy, sly-like, while he makes a motion like he was drawin' a knife.

Mister Grommet savvies. The bald-headed gent totes a knife, with which he punctuates his quarrels. Mike scowls, an' his lids narrow. Then Bowie Bill takes his right hand an' draws it away up high, indicatin' length, an' points where Texas Joe is holdin' up the bar. Yes; old Grommet sabes; it's the tall gent Bowie Bill refers to. Whiskers then straightens out the first finger of each hand an' wiggles his thumbs, an' shakes his head, warnin' like. The long hombre is a gunfighter. Bill jabs a loquacious finger up his sleeves, betrayin' to Mike Grommet the secret hidin' place of Texas Joe's hardware.

While I am observin' Bowie Bill out of the corner of my eye, I slide in between Baldy an' Texas Joe to tip 'em off. What I ain't figgered on none was the horsepower of this here booze them rannies has been lappin' up.

"Hey," I says in a whisper, "listen, you bohunks. I got a scheme. This is a tough town, an' any bird that ain't pretty tough is looked on suspiciously."

"Is that so," says Texas Joe, scowlin'.

"The old dummy that runs this dump," I says, "is watchin' us like a hawk, figgerin' we might be prohibition agents, or somethin'. But I fixed it."

"I bet you did," says Texas Joe.

Baldy, he don't say nothin', but he's takin' it all in.

"You are Dirk Abbey," I tells Baldy in a low voice so's there won't nobody get wise. "An' you," I says to Texas Joe—"you're Hair-trigger Yazoo. All you birds has got to do is act tough——"

"To hell with it!" yells Baldy, straightenin' up an' squarin' his shoulders an lickin' his lips with his tongue. "I don't have to *act* tough. *I am tough!*"

"Holy cow!" I says. "Not so loud."

Well, everybody begins lookin' at us, an' I wish we was out of War Dance. I got two half-lit rannies here who are liable to start on the prod any minute, an' we ain't got no more weapons than there is hair on a billiard ball.

While I am tryin' to make Baldy promise to behave himself if it kills him, in walks a tall, peaked-faced gent who everybody acts like they was half scared of. This hombre is wearin' a black hat with a flat crown an' stiff brim, a rusty black frock coat, a sporty vest an' a pair of ridin' boots like, which his trousers is tucked into the top of. He was a mournful-lookin' bird an' I got the

idea he was a minister or a missionary, or somethin'.

Old Mike Grommet an' Bowie Bill, they bow an' palaver like they esteemed this gent a whole pile, an' pretty soon they has got their heads together as sociable as raisins in a bun. There sort of seems to be trouble brewin', an' I decides I'd better get Baldy an' Texas Joe out of Mike Grommet's saloon before them loco warts went off half-cock.

"I'm a tough son-of-a-sea-cook!" blats Baldy, pickin' up his old sombrero an' wingin' it around his head. "Yeow!"

Texas Joe takes a hitch on his britches an' cants his hat over one eye. "Ha'r-trigger Yazoo-o!" he chants. "That's me. Yezzir! I live in Death Valley, an' I sleep on a downy bed of cactus. Whee-ee!"

"You'll sleep in War Dance," I says, "if you don't pull your freight pretty soon."

The gent in the black frock coat scowls; then he begins to nod his head as Bowie Bill makes talk in his ear.

Baldy, he looks around at everybody like he was invitin' 'em to make a crack, but there don't any hombre take him up. About this time that bald-headed Sours gent gets his eyes on the sad-faced gink in the long black coat, an' he ambles over to make his acquaintance. The stranger has been standin' with one elbow on the bar. He watches Baldy approachin' for a second; then he says somethin' to Bowie Bill, an' right away old whiskers heads for the door.

While I'm wonderin' what the idea is, Baldy commences to toot his horn. The licker has all backed up into his fool head. His legs is all right, but his brain is afloat. He flourishes his old black sombrero in Mike Grommet's face.

"I'm *tough!*" blasts Baldy, pushin' his lips out an' then suckin' 'em in like a gimlet-mouth poodle. "Yeow! I *look* tough, an' I *act* tough, an' I *am* tough, by thunder!"

Mike hits the bar with his fist, an' he yells: "Get away from me, ye dam' fool!"

"Huh!" says the sad-faced bird in the black coat snappy. "You only *think* you're tough, you moon-faced yap! Go sit down before somebody comes along and shoots you."

Texas Joe now ambles forward an' makes his dayboot. Him an' Baldy yelp in uniform.

"I'm Duke McAbbey," yowls Baldy. "I'm pizen mean, an' I'm liable to get pizener."

"An' I'm Ha'r-trigger Yazoo-o!" Texas joins the chorus. "I live in Death Valley in the last house."

"When the gent they calls the Buzzard hears me bayin' he wants to seek his hole," hollers that drunken fool, Baldy, gettin' braver every minute. "He'd better fly high if he desires to keep his feathers."

Texas Joe waves his hand an' bursts into song:

"Ole Dowdle Bill, like all the rest,
He did to death resign;
And in his bloom went up the flume,
In the days of forty-nine."

Them two angleworms has went clear off the handle, an' what they're liable to start in this here War Dance is horrible to consider. I am about to try an' show 'em the error of their ways when the door opens an' in clatters the toughest-lookin' Alick I ever seen.

This here gent has got a droopin' mustache, long hair, two six-shooters, a cartridge belt full of lead an' a bowie knife a foot long. He swaggers up to the bar an' bangs it a wallop, an' hollers, "Whuskey!"

Well, sir, them two bartenders just trod on each other they're that anxious to be prompt an' obligin'. Baldy an' Texas Joe, they're so busy chantin' war-whoops an' tellin' how tough they are that they never see this gent a-tall. I look to see if there is a back door, an' there is—an' just then the front door opens again an' here comes another bird.

Cowboy, how-d'ye-do! This second gent is tougher lookin' four ways than the feller who proceeds him. He was the most villainous hombre I ever seen. Men, my heart stops beatin'.

"Whuskey!" hollers the newcomer in a deep, hoarse voice.

You should ought to saw them bartenders. They creates a blur passin' out whiskey bottles. I tries to wigwag Baldy an' Texas Joe, but them birds is flyin' high

with language an' they don't hear nothin' but their own echo. I jumps for where they are hollerin' at Mike Grommet an' the sad-faced feller with the black frock coat, an' I says, "For cripes' sake come out of here!"

"To hell with it!" howls Baldy. "These fellers don't believe we're tough. Do ya?" he says, stickin' his face in front of Mike Grommet. "Ya don't reckon I'm a tough hombre, do ya? Want we should show ya? Harh? Do ya?"

Mike Grommet's head begins to sway back an' forward slow, an' he looks like he's goin' to crawl Baldy right now. "You shet yore face!" he shouts. "Or I'll show ye who's tough 'round here, ye dam' noisy kioty. I am sick of listenin' to ye."

"My gosh, he's got his hearin' back!" I says.

The outside door opens again, an' in comes two more tough-lookin' Alicks. They strut to the bar, an' they yell for "whuskey" together. That makes four of 'em lined up, they got enough artillery to stop the charge of the last six hundred. Man, them hombres is fortified.

Everybody is watchin' Baldy an' Texas Joe, an' sort of holdin' their breath. I ain't so scared since I was in France. Just let one of them forty-fives go off an' I organize my two poor, feeble legs an' turn 'em loose. I'll fight for my country an' my life, but I ain't one of them dog-gone rannies that battle for pastime.

"I come all the way from Garfield, Nevady," yaps Baldy, who's as crazy as a bedbug, "jist a-scannin' for that hombre they call the Buzzard. Don't that show how tough I am? All the way from Garfield, a-lookin' for to meet up with that low-down, feathered scorpion who designates hisself a Buzzard. Whee!"

"We is sartin snoopin' fer him right now," chants Texas Joe, whackin' the sad-faced bird on the shoulder.

"Why," says the gent in the black frock coat, dustin' off where Texas slaps him, his voice as soft as a March thaw, "is *that* who you gents are prospectin' for? I want to know."

"Yezzir!" hoots Baldy. "I'm a Buzzard-hunter by trade. Dead or alive is my motter. I redeem 'em defunct or with their boots on." An' he waves his blasted old hat around his head again.

"We'd admire to meet up with this hooman vultoor!" blabs Texas Joe, now whangin' the bar with his fist. "We'd pick him prontó, an' singe his pinfeathers. My label is Ha'r-trigger Yazoo-o! Yezzir, that's my monicker. Yip, yip, yip-ee-e! Let's have another drink before pro'bition."

"Gentlemen," says the gent who looks like a cross between a minister an' a tinhorn, removin' his hat an' bowin' as polite as a course of soup, "this is most fortunate. *I am the Buzzard!*"

Holy Joe!

Baldy puts on his hat, an' he starts blinkin', first slow; then faster an' faster. There's things revolvin' in his old bald koop he didn't never know he had there, I betcha. Texas loses control of his lower jaw, an' it sags down an' hits him on the chest, while his eyes bulge out until they look like these here onnux gear-shift balls.

"I am the Buzzard," repeats the gent, speakin' as friendly as barbed wire, "an' *those* are my talons." He nods his head where the gents with all the artillery is drinkin' "whuskey."

Baldy an' Texas Joe turns around an' look behind 'em, an' when they get a view of them four hombres all freighted down with six-shooters an' cartridge belts an' bowie knives, why, they just sort of gloss over an' petrify. You seen a statue of some of them old generals—well, here was a statue of two cowboys.

Mike Grommet spits in a box of sawdust, an' then twists down one corner of his mouth. "Well," he says, "what's the matter with you tough hombres?"

You could see Baldy an' Texas Joe soberin' off.

"I'm a son-of-a-gun!" gasps Baldy, gazin' around wild.

"Where the hell did them fellers come from?" says Texas Joe, gettin' ready to paw the hackamore.

Gents, I am so scared I'm sweatin' frozen beads of perspiration. Just one false move an' I'm gone. I got a window all picked out.

"Stranger," says a low voice in my ear,

"it's all right; yore friends will git decent burial."

I whirl around, an' here's old Bowie Bill. He's waggin' his head sorrowful. "Hit's a pity," he says. "Right in you-alls' bloom."

"W-why?" I gasps, my knees knockin' together like a loose connectin' rod. "We ain't done nothin'."

"Too much talk," says Bowie Bill solemn. "This yere Buzzard, he's ag'in it. The foonrulls will be in the mornin'."

The old stiff wipes at his eyes, an' I tries to yell at Baldy an' Texas Joe.

"Run-n-n!" hisses Bowie Bill in my ear. "Run-n-n fer yore life, stranger!"

No cock-eyed old blat has to tell me when to run—I *know!* I am all ready to aviate when one of the tough Alicks flips out a six-shooter an' throws down on Baldy an' Texas Joe The Buzzard an' Mike Grommet start to laugh.

"The third button on the short feller's vest!" shouts the Buzzard.

Bang!

Baldy grabs for his stummick an' hops in the air about four foot, an' Texas Joe holds up his hands. I'm as desperate as a badger in a barrel, because I feel it was my fool idea that starts the mêlée.

I grab for a whiskey bottle that's settin' on the bar, an' I christen the bird with the six-shooter right on the prow. He bogs. I snatch the gun, an' I swear I ain't the length of a hamstrung heifer from the Buzzard when I drill at his gizzard.

"Come again, an' often," he chirps as happy as a lark.

An' I did, but never a fall do I get out of him. I look the six-shooter in the guzzle; then reverse ends an' sloughs the nearest gent I am to on the nut.

One hombre drops his head on his arms on the bar an' I think he is sobbin' at this wanton waste of life, but I'll de danged if he don't turn out to be laughin'. Right then I figgers this is about the toughest town I ever was in.

One of the two-gun gents starts shootin' at Texas Joe's stummick, an' another one pumps lead at Baldy. The third feller comes a-foggin' at me, an' I swear I can feel them bullets prospectin' around in my vitals. It was the worst I ever seen.

One of the bartenders tries to reach over an' punch me in the eye. Mike Grommet picks up a bung-starter an' prowls for Baldy. He don't connect on account of Texas Joe run over him. You'd thought that cowboy was entered in a wild-horse race. He straddles old man Grommet an' Mike sunfishes. Texas rebounces, an' lands on his ear. He hops up an' puts all his muscle into runnin', an' meets a bird in shirt sleeves in the door like forty brick fallin' off a chimney.

Baldy has got his mouth wide open, an' he is hollerin' so loud you could heard him in South Dakota. "I'm shot! My Gawd, I'm shot!"

But he was the fastest-runnin' dyin' man you'd meet up with in a week of Sundays. He trips over the Buzzard, an' he don't stop to get on his feet a-tall, but starts for Carson City, Nevada, on his hands and knees.

Somebody hollers, "I'd give a million dollars to have a camera on this!"

The man was crazy. What they wanted was the National Guard.

Outside in the street women is screamin', an' strong men is tryin' to get into Mike Grommet's place to see the fun. Them inside is tryin' to get out before it's too late.

Durin' his journey on the floor, Baldy finds one of them vazes they call a cuspidor. He cuddles it in his childish hands, an' clumb onto his feet. In a second he fits it to a gent's head so hard I'll bet a dollar that bird ain't got it off yet.

I ducks behind the bar, an' falls over one of them bartenders who is crouched in a seemin' attitude of prayer. He takes a sock at me with a goblet, an' then it's my turn. I try to soothe him with the butt of the six-shooter, an' some hombre baptises me with a pop bottle. If I ain't drunk before, I sure got the heebegeebies now.

The gent with the cuspidor on his head is runnin' around like a bottle-neck gourd on a bat. First he falls over a chair; then he gets up an' rams a rack full of billiard cues. This gives Baldy an idea. He chases back an' plucks a couple handfuls of pool balls, an' starts bowlin'.

The first one caroms off Mike Grommet's head, an' knocks a hole in a mirror behind

the bar. There was seven years bad luck right there. The next one slaps into the eye of one of them tough Alicks like it was the pocket on a pool table.

The Buzzard sits up from where he has been servin' as a carpet, an' he's just in time for Mike Grommet to fall over him.

Old Bowie Bill, he feels called on to put his finger in the puddin', an', as he's obstructin' my road to a nearby winder, I make a grab for his whiskers with one hand an' try to hang a v art on him with that six-shooter I am packin' around by the barrel. Bowie lets out a whoop an' starts to swarm my spine, but he lets go when he finds he is wearin' a window sash for a necktie.

I don't lose no time a-tall. Either us waddies get out of War Dance sudden or we'll prob'ly get a home with that sheriff Bowie Bill was tellin' me about. My feet commence to revolve before I hit the ground, an' I'm runnin' even sixty miles an hour.

What strikes me as sort of queer is how many flappers with canned complexions I see flittin' around, not to mention some bozos in knee pants. An' then, by the light of two-three old lamps I get a glimpse of a lot of stuff stacked on the piazza of the buildin' next to Mike Grommet's place which ain't got nothin' to do with a wild and woolly town like War Dance.

If I'd had more time, I could prob'ly figgered it all out by myself without no help, but I had got to wind up that dog-gone flivver an' get her percolatin'.

I cock the gas an' the spark all the way; then tromp on the low gadget an' wrastle the wheel, which is so loose this here flivver jumps this way an' jumps that way like she was related to a sidewinder.

When I get 'er around the corner from where she was parked an' onto Main Street everythin' is wide open, includin' the doors. There ain't no lights, an' there ain't no horn, an' not no reverse, but we didn't need none of them things. We knew where we was goin', you could hear us comin' anyhow, an' what the Sam Hill would we want of a reverse when we wa'n't goin' back?

I had it all figgered out. If Baldy an' Texas Joe was holdin' their own, or a little better, they'd hear this desert hellion an' know sucker was on the way.

Just as I croons past Mike Grommet's saloon out busts Baldy backwards. Man, he was travelin'. He's lost his hat, he ain't got no coat, an' he's in his undershirt. Texas Joe is plowin' right behind him.

Once in a while somebody got either in Baldy's or Texas's way, an' when they did they got run over; that was all. I gained a little on them bohunks until I hit the sandy road out of War Dance; then they went past me like I was standin' still.

I didn't overtake 'em for an hour an' a half. An', would you believe it, when I come up where they was, them two rannies was standin' out in the middle of the Desert of Fire in the moonlight lookin' at one another's stummicks for bullet holes.

"I'll be a cock-eyed-son-of-a-sea-cook!" says Baldy. "I could swear I was shot eight times."

"My Gawd!" yowls Texas Joe. "I know there's lead in me; I can feel it. Look more in my hind quarters, Baldy."

Well, do you know, we got 'way to Barstow before we ever did find out about that there dog-gone War Dance. There was a piece in the paper, an' it says that the Out West Fillum Company had been on location at War Dance, an' one night three strange cowboys in a flivver arrove, an' the leadin' men thought it would be a good chance, it says, to play a swell joke, but that the joke back-fired an' there was a hellufa fight.

It says in the piece we was readin' that four of the movin' pitcher outfit's top-hands could be figgered as on the sick list, so to speak, for a couple weeks, durin' which time work would be held up.

A feller who's been ridin' for an outfit over Gover'ment Holes way was tellin' me an' Baldy an' Texas Joe that how he heard it was like this. Mike Grommet had been bootleggin' right along, an' when the movin' pitcher birds allowed they would use his saloon for some of the scenes, why, he thinks it's a corkin' chance to peddle booze right across the bar, on account there ain't no sheriff or nothin' for two hundred miles.

Baldy says he ain't been in such a lovely fight since 1918, but to hell with huntin' any more outlaws, on account next time them six-guns might not be loaded with blanks.

BLISTERING WIRES

By Ray Nafziger

The Hooker Bros. install a telephone and the wires begin to cross, burn and short-circuit. Take down the receiver and listen in on this latest laugh riot caused by Johnnie and his li'l coot brother Stevie.

"WHAT I'm askin' you is this!" bellers my coot li'l brother Stevie what pardners it with me, Johnny Hooker, on our cow ranch in Canyon Lobo. "I'm askin' you is this a real cow ranch we're runnin' here or ain't it? I asks you, noodle, are we goin' t' keep our cow ranch up-to-date or ain't we? If not, why don't you trade our cattle for some old-fashioned longhorn steers and move out o' this house and live in a cave? Now, me, I believe in progress! Me, I believe in advancement! Me, I believe in goin' ahead!"

"But not at my expense!" I bellers. "I believe in progress and advancin', too, but I ain't cuckoo about it like you. What you figgerin' on doin' now, y' simp? Have you got a new feedin' rashun of peanut candy and canned bean soup for fattenin' baby beeves? Or is it a scheme to breed prairie dogs with foxes and start a fur ranch here?"

"Naw, it ain't none of them things, y' igneramus!" bawls Stevie at me. "I'm just sayin' we got to have the modern inventions ev'ry other ranch has nowadays. We got to have what ev'ry business in this U. S. A. needs. I ask you what is the cryin' problem of the day? What does ev'ry successful business, whether ranch or factory, have that we ain't got here on our place?"

"I can tell you easy what they *ain't* got," I says snappy. "They ain't got no coot li'l brother around to pester the life out of the feller who's the brains of the business. That's what they ain't got!"

"Piffle!" snorts Stevie. "Git serious. I ask you what is the cryin' need of the day?" he demands oratorical. "What is the thing that ev'rybody is tryin' t' do nowadays?"

"A lot o' people is tryin' to git light wines and beer back," I says.

"Naw, not that, you dang fool," Stevie says irritated. "The cryin' need o' the day is for devices to save time. Time is money. Save time and you save money. Savin' time—that's the cryin' need of the day."

"If you want to save a lot of time here why not have ev'rybody on this ranch stop gassin' so much and git some work done?" I suggests kind o' brilliant.

"Yessir," goes on Stevie not payin' no

attention to me, "the cryin' need of the day is for the obliteration of time and space and bringin' your far-off neighbor next door, as it were. That's the cryin' need of the day. And that's where our ranch falls down. The only way we can communicate with anybody is to go see 'em by horseback or in a flivver what's out of order most of the time. And I ask you what's the solution?"

"Well, what is the solution, coot?" I says. "I got work to do and I got to ride out and do it. Make it snappy. What you drivin' at, Dan'l Webster? What's the soultion of not bein' able to gas with our neighbors without ridin' t' see 'em?"

"The solution is a tellerphone," says Stevie. "We need a tellerphone on this ranch."

"Tellerphone! Go to the expense of puttin' in a tellerphone!" I bellers. "What the 'H' as in 'Hot' the 'E' as in 'Etcetry,' the double 'L' as in 'Hell,' do we need a tellerphone for?"

"I just been tellin' you why we needed it!" says Stevie. "To save time, y' igneramus! S'posin' one of us gits sick. S'posin' one of us out here drinks some bum bootleg and goes blind from it! What would we do?"

"That's easy t' answer," I tells him. "The first thing I'd do would be to go out and shoot that bootlegger plumb full of holes. Next I'd ride for a doctor."

"And while we're ridin' for a doctor," Stevie points out triumphant, "whoever drank that bootleg might die. But if we have a phone we can call a doctor in a few seconds and have him come out in his car and save a life. That ain't the only way it'll save time. S'posin' we wanted to know if the cattle cars we ordered has arrived at Sunset. Instead of takin' a half day off and ridin' in to see, we just phones the R. R. agent."

"There wouldn't be no use phonin' to see if the cars had arrived," I says. "That cuckoo railroad ain't never had no cars there at the time we ordered 'em yet. We wouldn't need no phone to find that out. I say no tellerphone! We ain't goin' to spend none of my good money for nothin' like that!"

"Bosh!" roars Stevie. "You make me sick! There ain't no use tryin' to argue with a dumbbell like you. The Forest Service is changin' their Paralta fire lookout station phone line to go by way of Priest Canyon. All we got to do is to buy a mile or so of wire and string it from Priest Canyon over to our place and git a permit to hook up."

"Yeh, is that all?" I says sarcastic. "What about the money that wire and phone costs? What about the time it takes to put it in? We ain't got no time or money for no tellerphone! If they's any cowboy on this place what's goin' t' drink some bum bootleg and have to have a doctor to save his life, he'd better git off now—that's me, Johnny Hooker, broadcastin'! All you want a phone for, anyway, is to talk to your sweeties ev'ry night. As long as I'm boss of this ranch, y' hear me, there won't be no tellerphones strung in here. And that's final!" I says crushin'. "Git me! No tellerphone!"

So I steps on my bronc and I high-tails it out of there, knowin' that whatever happens there won't be no more talk about no dang phone on our cow ranch. That's the way me, Johnny Hooker has to be with my li'l brother Stevie. I simply got t' be firm and set down on him and squash his fool schemes like I would squash a louse. That boy's simply loco in the head.

Anyway that ends the tellerphone propersition, as I'm boss of the ranch even if me and Stevie are equal pardners. I rides off on some business, which is goin' over to look at a bunch o' steers bein' offered for sale on the other side o' the range.

When I gits back a coupla days later what does I find? What does I find, I repeats? Pestiferous Polecats, what I finds would make the cat pass out on the parlor carpet!

That coot Stevie and our hands, Pablo and old George and "One-ton" Benson, is stringin' up a tellerphone line from the Forest Service line in Priest Canyon across the ridge to our place. They're climbin' around like dang monkeys on trees, attachin' the wire and puttin' up poles where they ain't no trees.

"It looks like I can't turn my back without you doin' some dang fool thing!" I

says mad to Stevie. "Didn't I tell you not to put no phone line up here?"

"I'm half owner of this ranch," Stevie says sassy. "G'wan, chase yourself, imbecile! You make me tired, kickin' at the improvements I make on this ranch. Catch up with the times! Grab a-holt and git busy and help us."

"Not me!" I tells him. "I ain't got nothin' t' do with this phone. We ain't got no money to spend on a dang affair like this, I tell you, and we don't need no phone anyway."

"It would be just like the way things usually happen," remarks Stevie, "if this tellerphone was the means o' savin' your life some day. Yessir, I won't be much surprised if you git sick some time and we phone for the doctor or somethin' of that kind and save your life."

"Yeah, I got a picture of that tellerphone ever savin' my life," I says. "I'll be thankful if the dang thing just leaves me alone without it tryin' to do me no favors. I got a feelin' that phone don't mean nothin' but bad luck in my life."

Which ain't so far off either. That's the way things go on this ranch. I runs things safe and sane and saves money and Stevie blows in the coin for fool things like that. It discourages me to where I a'most feel like givin' this ranch to Stevie and goin' off somewheres and startin' a place by myself. Stevie and One-ton and old George and Pablo works on that dang line for dang near a week and while them coots wastes their time on that tellerphone line I chases around doin' all their work.

Finelly they has wire strung down to our shack and they sticks the phone box up in the kitchen.

After they has it hooked up Stevie perceeds to call up his girl over at the T-X-Y Ranch first thing.

"Hello, is Nellie there?" he asks whoever answers the phone. "I'd like to talk to her a minute."

That sure is a long minute. Me and One-ton and old George and Pablo makes supper and eats it and still Stevie is gassin' away to that girl. We sure hears some juicy talk. He hands that girl out a line what would make a prairie dog sick.

"Ring off!" I bellers after the first hour has gone by. "I want to do some figgerin' and I cain't do it with you spoutin' away."

"Shut up!" says Stevie. "This tellerphone is goin' to save your life some time and then you'll regret the slams you cast at it."

"It'll kill me 'stead o' savin' my life if I got to stick around here for a hour ev'ry night lissenin' to you soft-soap that girl," I remarks. "Ain't you got no modesty, anyway?" I asks. "I bet ev'rybody on this line is lissenin' in on that talk."

That's another great feature about this great modern invention of a tellerphone Stevie interduced on our ranch. They's only about 44 other parties connected up on the same line and able t' lissen to the talkin' of ev'rybody else. Ev'ry time you ring up somebody you can count 44 receivers goin' *click-click* as the other parties lopes up t' lissen in on what you're sayin'. That phone sure beats a paper for spreadin' news.

After Stevie finishes talkin' to his damsel, One-ton, he calls up *his* girl and he kids her about a hour also, handin' her a line of slush. And all them 2 fellers does that night is call up damsels and talk with 'em.

That's about all the use that phone ever has on our ranch—Stevie or One-ton talkin' to damsels. It's sickenin' the way them boys rings up their sweeties 2 or 3 times a day. Me, I simply ignores that phone—it's just that much coin throwed out, I figgers.

The only time I does go near it I don't git no satisfaction out of it. It's one day when I figgers it might come in handy to use it. Pablo and me has rounded up some calves and I wants to tell our neighbor on the next ranch, Bill Benz, to come over and look at 'em, as he said he wanted to buy a few. So I goes into the house and I twists the handle for 2 long rings and 2 short rings and 1 long ring and 1 short ring and another long ring, same bein' the Benz Ranch call. I takes off the receiver and hears the follerin' in a feemale's voice gabbin' along at 40 miles a hour:

"——and I heard her say to her husband, 'Joe, I slave here on this ranch all day and

cook for these hungry cowhands and when I want a new hat, I don't get it and it's got to end,' she says."

"Well is that so?" says the other feemale's voice. "Go ahead, Louise. And what did he say to that?"

"He said, 'What's the matter with your old hat?' 'I wouldn't wear it to a dog fight,' she told him, and——"

I lissens to that gossip for 10 minutes, hopin' them feemales will finish, but they don't.

"Pardon me, ma'ams," I says finelly, "but could I use the phone just a minute—I want to call up Bill Benz and if I could have the phone just a minute I'd sure appreciate the favor——"

"How dare you?" one of them feemales bawls me out.

"Well, the nerve of the inseck!" snaps the other feemale. "Git off that phone and don't eavesdrop to our talk."

"But, ma'am," I pleads, "I only want to use this tellerphone for a coupla minutes and the rules of the tellerphone line say conversations is limited to 3 minutes anyway and——"

"Yes?" says one of the feemales in real blizzardy tones. "Do you mean to intimate we been talkin' 3 minutes? We haven't been here 10 seconds! Git away and use this phone when we're through! Who do you think you are? You must think you own this phone line!"

"No, ma'am," I tells her, "I don't think I own this phone line, but I would just like to use it for a few seconds if you don't mind."

"Well, we most certainly do mind, and if you don't git away from this phone, we'll report you and have your phone taken right out!" they snaps.

"That sounds to me like it's one of that Hooker Ranch outfit over at Canyon Lobo," one of the feemales remarks. "Those roughnecks over there have all sorts of nerve, especially that Johnny Hooker. Stevie, he's real gentlemanly, but as I was sayin' to Henry just the other day, if that Johnny Hooker had lived in the old days, they'd 'a' strung him up a long time ago. The way they say he positively swills bootleg whiskey—it's positively a crime! And he's got such a nice brother, too—so gentlemanly."

"And the way that Johnny is so stuck on hisself," says the other feemale. "He's positively funny. He thinks he's a lady killer. I'd feel sorry for any girl that would marry that bum."

"Ha! Ha!" snickers the other woman. "Well, I guess no girl will ever be that foolish. All Johnny ever does is git into jail or into some kind of trouble. And his brother Stevie is *so* gentlemanly—it's a shame!"

Well, no feemale can stand and talk about me like that over no phone with me standin' by lissenin' to it and not doin' nothin' about it. If they think they can talk like that about me, they sure don't know Johnny Hooker. So I slams the receiver back on the hook and I sets down and waits for the dang gossips to ring off.

"The tellerphone sure is one wonderful invention for a cow ranch and I don't see how we got along without one before," I ejaculates as I waits. But still I figgers even if I have to wait half a hour for them gossip mills to git off the line it will save a long ride over to Bill Benz's.

Finelly them feemales ring off and I springs for the phone and twists its tail quick, ringin' 2 longs, 2 shorts, 1 long, 1 short and another long and I lifts up the receiver.

"Git off of this line!" some feemale snaps at me. "What do you mean by ringin' while I'm puttin' in a call?"

"But, ma'am," I pertests, "I been waitin' a hour to use this tellerphone and if you'll only let me use it for a few seconds of time, you can have it for the next year for all I care."

"I got it first!" she says. "Hello, Miz Titzell. Is that you, Miz Titzell? Well, I got some more news about them Hooker brothers. They say Stevie brought Johnny home last Saturday simply soused to the gills. Poor Stevie. They say he had to bring Johnny home just like a sack of corn in the back of the flivver—he was so drunk!"

"It's a dang lie!" I bawls. "I was just sleepy, that was all, and I laid down in the

back of the flivver to sleep while Stevie drove!"

Well, no feemale can slander me like that so long as I'm around and if they think they can they sure don't know Johnny Hooker. I slams the receiver back on the hook and cusses that phone and I hops my pony and rides over to Bill Benz's like I ought to of done in the first place.

"I don't see how we ever got along without this great modern invention," I remarks sarcastic t' Stevie that night. "The only way a tellerphone could save time in this country would be for you to have a private line. With all these feemales slanderin' their neighbors and gassin' about their settin' hens hatchin' out 14 chickens, we wouldn't have no chance to call a doctor to save anybody's life. Yeah, the tellerphone sure is a great invention. I don't see how we ever got along without it all these years."

"Shut up!" says Stevie. "You don't know how to git the phone away from them ladies, that's all. You got to use tact on 'em."

"You got to use a axe on 'em," I says. "For 2 cents I would throw that dang phone off this ranch."

"All right," says Stevie. "Rave on, but just wait—that tellerphone will save your life some day, and after that you'll be thankful you got this great modern invention on our cow ranch."

"It's one 'ell of a invention," I says. "All it's good for is for these feemales to slander their neighbors all day."

It's about 2 weeks later at about dusk that I hooks my spurs in my bronc and lopes down the canyon for home. Stevie hollers at me from the door as I rides past and I stops. Stevie's wobbly on his feet and pale as a clean sheet. I can hear a lot o' gruntin' goin' on in the house.

"Me and George has been poisoned," says Stevie. "We opened a can o' corn and ate it and it poisoned us. I'm afraid old George is goin' to cash in from the way he grunts."

"Well, why don't you use the phone?" I asks. "Here's one of these emergencies you've always been talkin' about. Call the doctor and have him speed out here. That is, if some feemales don't want to use the line."

"The line's down," says Stevie. "It's busted at that pole on the ridge right where it crosses the trail. It ain't hard to fix, but I'm too weak to make it up there. Take them climbers," says Stevie, "and hook up that line. It won't take you 5 minutes. Meanwhile I'll take care o' old George."

"I hadn't better waste no time foolin' with fixin' that tellerphone line," I tells Stevie. "Even if I git the line fixed something else'll be out of order most likely. I'd better burn the breeze for Bill Benz's ranch and take his car and go to town. We can't waste time tryin' t' phone for no doctor."

"No, this'll be quicker," says Stevie. "What we got a phone out here for, anyway, you coot?" he says peevish. "I told you it'd save somebody's life sometime and here's where it does."

"I doubt it a whole lot," I returns. So I grabs them climbers and some wire and a pair pliers and climbs back on my pony and gallups up the trail to the place where Stevie told me the line is busted. The wire was busted off right at the insulator and all that's necessary for me to do is to attach more wire and climb up and hook it on. That oughtn't to take long, except for the fact that I never had no climbers on before.

I connects my extry piece o' wire to the wire on the ground, puts on my climbers and climbs up dang awkward. That aspen pole is about the size of a tooth pick and with me usin' climbers for the first time I has one 'ell of a time. I manages to git about ¾ the way up, and then as I'm goin' good, I slips and snags my britches on a stub of a branch the boys didn't trim off. And there I'm danglin' with my head hangin' down and my feet stickin' straight up and that pair o' climbers pointed at the sky.

That ain't no comfortable way to be and I struggles to git loose, but no matter how I squirm around I can't git loose. I can git my arms around the pole but I can't lift myself off the snag that way. It happens I'm wearin' a pair corduroy britches and they holds like iron.

Well, that's what comes of puttin' in a

dang tellerphone line. I cusses and kicks around until I hear somebody ridin' down the trail.

"Hey!" I hollers. "Help!"

It's One-ton and Pablo and they ride over.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" they inquires.

"I'm snagged up on this danged tellerphone pole," I bawls. "That's all's the matter. Old George is poisoned and we got to have a doctor right away. Git me down from here."

Pablo gits on One-ton's shoulder and climbs up the pole and tries to boost me up so I can git off that snag. Just as he gits me around right side up with my feet down ag'in I stick one of my climbers into Pablo's face accidental.

"Ow-wow!" Pablo bawls and he drops to the ground while I swings around ag'in with my head down and feet up.

Then Pablo and One-ton gives up that brilliant idee for gittin' me down and they gits another brilliant idee of takin' 2 long fence posts and tryin' to boost me off that snag from the ground. That's a dang good idee, too, except that they near rams those posts clear through to my gizzard and I hollers for 'em to lay off that.

Then they gits the idee of passin' up a knife for me to try to cut loose from that part of my britches what's snagged.

"And what happens when I cut myself loose?" I ask. "I'll come down plop on my head. Nit! Hurry up!" I bellers. "Git me offa here, y' galoots. Old George needs a doctor. I told Stevie not to bring no tellerphone line on this ranch."

So One-ton he tries to climb up that li'l pole, but just as he reaches me the weight of me and him swingin' back and forth on it is too much and the pole cracks and busts off. Me and One-ton and the pole descends. One-ton and the pole landin' on top o' me. It's just luck I don't git a leg busted.

"Gran Quivera!" I bellers as I gits up and examines myself for busted bones. "And Stevie said this phone might save my life sometime! I'm through. You fellers can stay and try to fix this line. I'm goin' to ride for a doctor. I ain't goin' to risk my life with no tellerphone line when there's a horse around."

I'm shook up a lot, but I crawls on my pony and races up the trail hell-bent for Bill Benz's ranch where I can git a car to go to Sunset for a doctor.

It's dark by this time, but I been over that trail only about 10,000 times and once I gits to the top of the ridge I sure cuts the wind for the Benz ranch.

"And they say a tellerphone is a time-saver and a great modern invention!" I remarks to myself. "Git along, pony! Pestiferous Polecats! It ain't even safe on this ranch with that tellerphone around!"

Which sure is a wiser statement than I even thought it was at the time. Me and my pony is racin' along down the trail where it crosses the crick and just before we gits to the crick, something suddenly grabs me across the breast stoppin' me some abrupt and liftin' me off that bronc and I sails back in the same direction I been comin'. I lands way back with a sickenin' crash and that's all I remember of that.

When I wake up I seem to be in bed somewhere and I seem to be all bandaged up.

"He's comin' out of it," I hears a voice say, the voice of Doc Holmes from Sunset. "I believe he might pull through at that and we may save his life after all."

"What happened?" I inquires feeble, as I opens my eyes. I can see I'm back at the ranch in my bunk with Stevie and One-ton and Doc Holmes standin' around me.

"You must of been ridin' along fast when you come to a place where the tellerphone line wire was sagged down just far enough to catch you in the chest as you rode along," says Stevie. "It knocked you off your bronc and you fell pretty hard on some rocks, but you lit on your head so you'll git over it all right. That's all that happened."

"Oh, is that all?" I remarks sarcastic. "How about old George?"

"He's all right," says Stevie. "He was just pretendin' to be real sick so he'd git a prescription for some likker. The boys got the tellerphone line fixed and we phoned for the doctor when they found you," he goes on. "Well, I told you that tellerphone

would save your life some time. Ain't you thankful we got it in?"

"Yeah," I remarks. "I'm so thankful that when I git up there won't be enough left of a phone around here to be found with a mikerscope. If I'd started out for the doc before dark without tryin' to fix that line, I'd 'a' seen that dang wire. And yet you say it saved my life, you dang idiot!

"Yeah," I goes on, "the tellerphone sure is a great invention, and I don't see how we got along without it before! Give me a shot of booze and go 'way and let me sleep —that's me, Johnny Hooker, on the subjeck of tellerphones!"

THE OLD CATTLE TRAIL

By Clarence Mansfield Lindsay

IN Texas!—In Texas!—In Texas, long ago!
When all the air was thick with dust from San Antonio—
Yes, clear up to the border, as the sweatin' cattlemen
Drove plungin' herds along the Trail an' eddied back again!

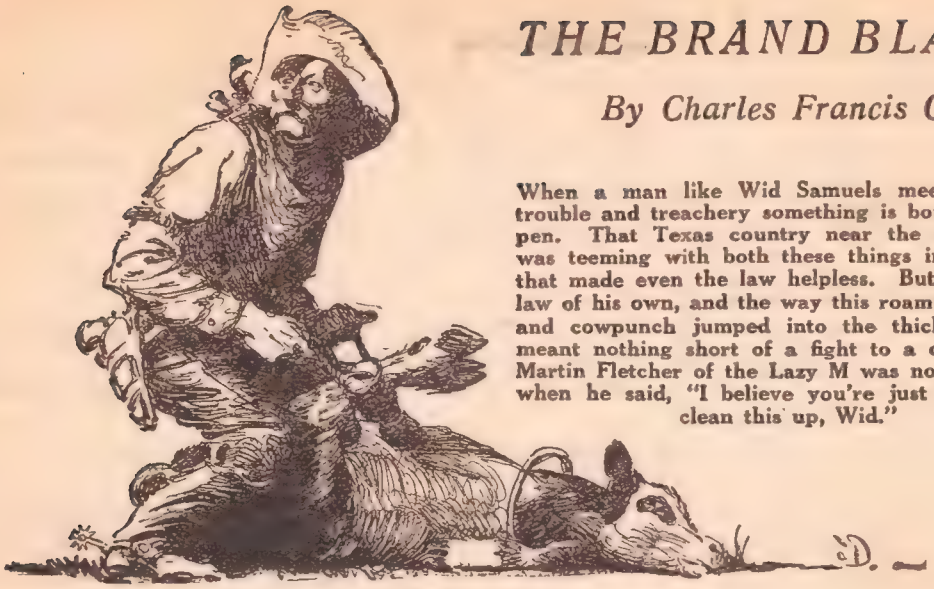
Can't yer see the smoke o' camp fires?
Can't yer *taste* it, with your mush?
Can't yer hear the bell-spurred liars
Fillin' tenderfeet with gush?

In Texas!—In Texas!—In Texas, long ago!
With the cactus an' the coyote an' the millin' to an' fro
Of the herds as they went thunderin' along the sun-parched way;
An' the buckaroos a-cussin' at the cattle an' the clay!

Can't yer smell the dust an' sweatin'?
Can't yer fairly *taste* it, pard?
Can't yer hear the boys a-bettin'
Chisholm sure is Hell's back yard?

In Texas!—In Texas!—In Texas, long ago!
Ah, men were men in Texas, in those days we used to know!
But they are gone;—the men are gone! An' like an old-time tale
The story of the cattle an' the fights along the Trail!

But old-timer, *you* remember,
Our camp-fire's ruddy glow!
Though we stamped out the last ember
In Texas—long ago!



THE BRAND BLAZER

By Charles Francis Coe

When a man like Wid Samuels meets up with trouble and treachery something is bound to happen. That Texas country near the Rio Grande was teeming with both these things in a manner that made even the law helpless. But Wid had a law of his own, and the way this roamin' top-hand and cowpunch jumped into the thick of affairs meant nothing short of a fight to a quick finish. Martin Fletcher of the Lazy M was not far wrong when he said, "I believe you're just the man t' clean this up, Wid."

CHAPTER I

The Border Artist

MIGUEL CORTEZ sat at a small round table in the barroom owned by Bart Elton. The place was crowded, but Miguel was alone. On all sides the raucuous notes of the merry-makers sounded their clarion call to happiness, but Miguel remained aloof, disdainful. Perhaps he sensed that his nationality was not conducive to friendly overtures from the others in the place.

As if the thought might have found existence in his mind he sneered slightly, the move tending to elevate the waxed mustache which adorned his lip. His black eyes snapped a little as he reached for the bottle which stood before him. Therein lay solace, and he poured himself a drink which he took with a slight tremor of his slender body.

Then, with a shrug that was both proud and careless, he reached into the folds of his bespangled shirt and withdrew a pencil. This he twirled rather expertly in the fingers of his right hand while his left searched within the same folds until they withdrew a small white pad. He laid the pad on the table before him, squaring it in position with his right hand. Then his sharp eyes roved over the room as if in search of some object.

He saw Bart Elton leaning on the end of the bar. Very quickly the pencil went into action. With darting strokes it traced its course over the paper. A long, bold stroke here; a deft touch, shaded, accurate, there. And in what seemed to be no time at all the bearded face of the owner of the saloon loomed from the paper. It was a wonderful likeness. The caricature might easily have spoken, it seemed.

Then others in the place were subjected to the pencil photography. Miguel drew from the process the joy of him who indulges an art. After Elton, he traced the features of the bartender. Into the lines of that face he imparted the cynical suspicions that were a part of the man's profession. The brow on the left side of the face was raised a little, the hands were reaching over the bar.

Miguel was an artist. A proud, disdainful, more or less ignored artist. He drew for his own amusement. As each face appeared under the touch of his pencil, he greeted it with emotions that seemed to vary little. Always he sneered; always, that is, with but one exception. The exception was when he sketched the face of the old Mexican woman who cared for the gowns of the dancing girls.

Into that face he penciled the lines of infinite devotion, endless sacrifice, deep-seated religion. For Miguel was known as a Mexican, and he hated the American "gringo."

Hated him because of the scorn with which Americans regarded him. In the blood of Miguel there was rebellion. He was ineffably proud; proud with the heritage of generations of aloofness. Yet these gringos scorned him as they might one of inferior race.

After the bartender had been sketched, Miguel glanced toward the dance floor. There were many brightly dressed girls there; a dozen at least. They flitted like birds of rare plumage from table to table. Miguel, being educated, knew the veneer under which their hearts must beat. He watched as they urged heavy-booted men onto the floor to dance. The sneer on his face broadened, for the men could not dance and Miguel knew it.

Then there appeared a man on the floor. He held his hand aloft in a request for silence and attention. Miguel continued his sneering contemplation of affairs. Now there was a degree of silence; silence that was marred considerably by the scraping of feet, the discourteous coughs of half-drunken men, the titter of foolish women. The scene struck him as typically American; typically foolish gringo!

Oil lamps sputtered overhead, casting a yellow and murky glow over the rambling rooms. From some distant point rattled the clicking bearings of the roulette wheel. A soft-voiced dealer at the faro table chanted his hymnal of ill and good fortune. Bart Elton, ever the keen money-getter, still leaned on the edge of the bar, his piercing eyes enveloping the scene even as those of Miguel did.

The man in the center of the room was talking now. His voice was cracked and husky from the searing of whiskey. His chin was covered by a stubble of beard which brought an even broader sneer to the clean-shaven lips of the elegant Miguel.

"Gents!" the man shouted, at the same time waving his hand in a gesture that embraced all present, "now is the time when the big show starts! This here place lives up to 'er reputation! Bart Elton has brung to this here town the greatest thing in the dancin' line that the West has ever saw. Her name is Butterfly Rose an' she'll do 'er stuff with toes that twinkle like stars!

"Order up yore drinks, gents, an' let yore blood run deep an' happy while you looks upon this here marvel o' all the many ages!"

As he finished his speech the man turned sidewise and waved toward a distant corner of the room. The violinist struck a wild, lingering chord that seeped through the smoke-hazed air like the eerie cry of a wounded puma. And as all eyes followed the direction indicated by the speaker, Butterfly Rose appeared.

She was dressed in a somewhat soiled but none the less gaudy butterfly costume. The fact that one of the lacy wings pointed up and the other down, was lost to the men in the place, apparently. They saw only that she was dancing on the tip ends of her toes; that there was a smile upon her painted lips and that her arms fluttered much as though they were wings propelling her fantastically through the air.

The impression she made was instantaneous. Shouts, whistles and the tramping of feet greeted her appearance. She danced her way to the center of the floor and stood there, poised as gracefully as an image.

And as she struck her poise, Miguel Cortez uttered a sibilant whisper. For a brief second his eyes glowed in amazement, then his hand fluttered toward the paper and the pencil in his fingers danced forth a replica of that which had impressed itself upon his retina. He drew that which he saw, at times pausing several seconds until the whirling body of the girl again struck a pose suited to his needs.

The dance came to an end with thunderous applause from the amazed gathering. Nothing like it had ever been seen in the town. Bart Elton had again scored mightily. Butterfly Rose as an innovation was a huge success. Men drank their loud appreciation until the forehead of the bartender was streaked with perspiration and even Bart himself was at work at his assistant's side.

But Miguel, after helping himself from the bottle again, seemed as much apart from things as he originally had. His black eyes rested steadily upon the sketch he had made of the girl. The sneer about his lips seemed

to soften a little with his contemplation of his own handiwork.

So occupied was he that he did not notice a man who leaned over his shoulder and looked at the sketch. He did not see the surprised look that spread over the strange face, nor did he know that the man immediately sought Bart Elton and held a whispered conversation with him. None of those things did Miguel know.

His first intimation that his presence had been more than casually noted was when Bart Elton himself stood before the table. Surprised that such as Elton would thus address him, Miguel yet retained control of his features and the eyes with which he greeted the American were steady and cold; even a little supercilious.

"Whatcha got there, Mex?" Bart demanded in friendly tone. As he spoke his hand reached for the slips of paper which held the various sketches Miguel had made. He did not, therefore, see the gleam of hatred and injured pride which flashed in the Mexican's eyes. Miguel detested being addressed as "Mex."

"Pictures of fools!" he snapped back. "Faces that are as dead, because they have nothing but life in them!" His words seemed to be spat forth, his tone carried the venom of a serpent.

"What'hell's the matter?" Bart Elton stammered; his hand stopped in mid-air over the sketches.

"There's nothing the matter." Miguel's voice had steadied. Into it now had come a cold, defiant hauteur. "There is nothing the matter which is not always the matter—gringo!"

"Gringo?" Bart smiled. "A little touchy to-night, ain't you? Lookin' fer trouble, was you?"

Miguel disdained to reply. His lips crept back into the sneer again, but he did not protest as Bart Elton picked up the slips of paper and whistled softly as he regarded the sketches upon them.

"Just do these, Mex?" he asked. "Derned if that ain't me!"

Still Miguel made no answer. Bart, sensing the added attraction of so great a feature as these sketches, shouted forth an invitation for all to come and see. He passed the slips into eager hands, and praise of them was unstinted. Men even went so far as to slap Miguel on the shoulder and to assure him in maudlin tones that he was the greatest ever. Much as a girl might shrink from the touch of an unwelcome lover, Miguel drew within himself as the hated Americans laid hands upon him.

"You'll walk outa here with a roll, Mex!" Bart Elton said finally. "Any gent wantin' his picture took can stand at the end o' the bar an' this Mex'll draw him up for a dollar! Ten per cent to the house an' each gent doin' business gets a drink with the picture."

Laughs greeted the plans. Men ran fingers over chins that were stubble-covered, as though they might be discovering, suddenly, a forgotten vanity.

"Peegs!" Miguel fairly shouted the word. His face had gone livid at the suggestion and so excited was he that he lost, for a time, the perfection of his English pronunciation. "Peegs!—you t'ink I do that?"

"This here gent is riled up, friends!" Bart Elton announced in puzzled tone. "He's been sittin' here for two hours an' now when we shows him appreciation he calls us pigs!"

"Git 'im a big sheet o' paper an' make him draw us a fine pic'ter o' Butterfly Rose!" a heavy voice suggested. "What do we care if he's riled? He'll draw the pic'ter or I'll draw a gun!" Many joined in the laugh that followed the threat, and there followed a general hunt for suitable paper while a messenger was despatched for the beautiful Rose.

When everything was in readiness and an eager crowd had made room about the table, Butterfly Rose struck her favorite pose and a bearded man gave Miguel orders:

"Fire away, greaser, an' do yore best!"

A pallor spread under the tan skin of Miguel Cortez, but he controlled fiery words that hung at his tongue's end. His pencil began a feverish dashing across the paper. Under the eyes of the watchers the form and features of Butterfly Rose took shape as if by magic. Some of the men gasped in surprise and commendation.

But Miguel only smiled. When the picture was done he rose and laid his slender fingers upon the paper. Then he faced those about him.

"See," he said softly, his words coming perfectly if a little slowly, "the picture is done. Beauty is there—no lines of life appear; only a beautiful young face eager to please, and to be admired. Now you will watch!" Again the pencil began it's course over the paper. A deft line appeared over the mouth; a shading had the effect of sinking the cheeks, the eyes suddenly appeared deep-set and the youthful beauty of the features faded as though stricken by age and the cumulative price of pleasure-seeking.

"So she will be soon," Miguel sneered. "That is why I say these faces are dead because they are filled with life. Life that does naught but live and thinks not of the future, the spiritual. . . ."

"Bunk!" shouted Bart Elton. "Draw that picture over again! Turn the page over, you brown faker!" He moved threateningly toward Miguel and the artist sank again into his chair, motioned to the girl to pose, and went silently to work. Once more the face appeared as Elton desired. When he had finished Miguel silently handed over the sketch, the one side with the face of beauty, the other with its encroaching cynicism and hardness.

"Am I to be rewarded?" he asked softly. "Will you not pay for this as you would have others?"

"Sure!" Elton snapped. "There ain't nothin' mean about me! What d'ye want?"

"I have drawn the picture—see, I will sign it with the name of Miguel Cortez—and I will give it to the fair subject for just one kiss!"

Butterfly Rose straightened as though slapped.

"He's—he's a Mex!" she cried. "How dare he ask that!"

From the circle of men there stepped forward a young fellow who obviously was a cowboy. His chin was set in determination, his eyes flashing with anger.

"Take that back, you yellow pup!" he snapped out. "Get down on your knees an' take it back, hear me?"

"I am Miguel Cortez! I take nothing back, as you say! Four hundred years ago came my ancestor from Spain. He captured all of Mexico for his country. He was the first man ever to brand a steer! He was rich with the blood which coursed his veins! Proud with the lands he owned! Great in the deeds he did! To this day his brand runs upon the Isthmus of Tehuantepec! There you may find his sketches even as I show you mine! I take nothing back! I scoff at the gringo fools through generations of great men!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" Bart Elton gasped.

"You'll take it back, you greaser!" the young rider repeated evenly. "You take it back or I'll twist every drop o' your damned blue blood out o' your carcass!"

He advanced to the table, then. His hands were rigid, though but half-clenched, his eyes gave off a leaping fire that made the Mexican quail inwardly.

"Down on your knees!" He had caught Miguel's wrist now and in his grasp the man's arm turned despite his struggles to free himself. A moan of anguish crossed his brown lips. There came a wild, throaty scream from behind the circle of watchers, then the roar of a revolver shot. The bullet went wild, lodging in the adobe wall well above the heads of the struggling men. A woman screamed. Men scuffled and Bart Elton bellowed an order that was lost in the commotion which followed the shot.

In the rear of the room two men were holding the fighting form of the aged Mexican woman who cared for the gowns of the dancing girls. She babbled incoherent words; at her feet lay the still-smoking revolver with which she had attempted to kill the man who dared touch Miguel Cortez.

But the young rider seemed heedless to all but his avowed purpose. He drove Miguel back against the wall, and in his steel-like hands the Mexican wilted, sank to the floor. Then the aggressor held him with one hand and caught the hand of Butterfly Rose in the other. He drew her forward until Miguel was cringing at her knees.

"Take it back, greaser!" he snapped, and his breath seemed scarcely to show any sign of his struggle, "an' take it back fast!"

But the Mexican, too, was fired by in-

ner rage. Like a flash his free hand darted into his shirt-front and came forth grasping a long, thin knife which glinted ominously in the murky light. With lightning rapidity he twisted his body in serpentine fashion and lunged upward, the knife striking at the body of the unknown rider.

However, the young man seemed wary indeed, and easily avoided the sweeping death. He released the girl's hand and drove his fist straight and true against the face of Miguel. The Mexican collapsed with a weird snoring sound.

"So much for you, Miguel Cortez," the rider said softly. "I've seen your kind before!" Then he retrieved the knife and, holding the hilt, struck the blade a sharp blow across the table edge. The weapon snapped with an insidious ring and men made way for the stranger as he strode toward the bar, heedless of both Miguel and the girl.

"I'm a stranger in these parts," he announced, "an' I ain't lookin' for trouble. But no greaser insults a white woman in front o' me. I ain't never seen this Butterfly Rose before an' I don't care if I never do again—but she's white an' he's Mex!

"My name's Samuels an' friends call me Wid. I been top-hand on some damn good ranches an' I'm huntin' me up a job—thassall."

"Wid," Bart Elton said, "the house is buyin'. We're plumb glad to meet up with you!" Approval came from men on all sides. The bar was quickly lined.

Miguel Cortez rose and walked proudly toward the door. Wid Samuels, sensing that the old crone was still being held by the men who had disarmed her, ordered that she be released to follow the Mexican out of the place.

"Leave her go," he said laughingly. "You can't blame her for standin' by a friend, can you? She didn't do any harm!"

The woman followed Miguel silently, her head bowed as though in grief. At the door the border artist turned and drew himself to full height. In tones ringing with scorn, his weak chin trembling with the force of his emotions, he addressed the men at the bar and particularly Wid Samuels.

"Never was a greater name in Mexico than that of Hernado Cortez! His curse upon you — gringos! The curse of the church he founded, the laws he made, the tradition that burns in the blood of his children! You shall see what that means!"

But the men laughed and turned again to their congratulations of the newly discovered Wid Samuels.

CHAPTER II

A Shot in the Dark

BART ELTON'S place did a land-office business for the rest of that epoch-making night. Men indulged with the precocious willingness of a good excuse suddenly disclosed. Though Wid Samuels declined all but the first drink, he had obviously established himself in their estimation and was accepted as one of them.

Shortly after the first excitement of Miguel's exit had subsided, Bart Elton brought a man to meet Wid. He was a hearty-voiced individual with an eye that gleamed wholesome honesty and a hand that shook with the virility of the plains in greeting.

"This gent is Martin Fletcher, Wid," Elton introduced. "He's a well-known gent in these parts an' owner o' the big Lazy M Ranch. I reckon you've heard o' it?"

"Mighty glad to meet up with you, Fletcher," Wid greeted. "I sure have heard o' your ranch. It's the biggest out here, ain't it?"

"I reckon 'tis!" Fletcher boomed in his heavy voice. "We're runnin' better'n three thousan' head out there now, an' the next one to us is Tobe Jefford with somethin' around a thousan'!"

"That's a lot o' cattle," Wid nodded. "A heap o' cattle."

"You was sayin' somethin' about a job, Wid," Fletcher went on. "We allus got room for a good man out at the Lazy M. I was tellin' Bart I'd talk with you about it. . ."

"That's my fodder, Fletcher," Wid said. "I ain't stoopin' under the weight o' my money an' the sooner I start the better off I'll be!"

"We can't offer you a top-hand job—but a good man can't be kept down, they say!" Fletcher laughed wholesomely, and Wid

was glad of a chance to associate with the man in any capacity. He had a feeling that honest effort would be well rewarded by the owner of the Lazy M.

"Start me goin' an' see where I end," Wid suggested. "I ain't expectin' to step in over other riders. I just got a feelin' that I can ride the way you wants me to, an' I ain't afraid o' work."

"Ride out to-morrow mornin', Wid," Fletcher responded. "You'll find us due southwest from town an' about three hours' ride. You hit our land an hour from town but it'll take two more to get to the ranch house. If you get there before noon I'll be around. If you don't, see Murray Wilson—he's my foreman."

"I'll get out there early, Fletcher."

"Good. I would if I was you. Not that I think you can't take care o' yourself—but this Miguel Cortez is all that he claims for himself! Blood goes deep an' runs hot with his kind. There was a day when his folks was the richest in all Mexico. What he says about old Hernado Cortez is right, too. He's a direct descendant o' the old pirate an' he's proud as a peacock!"

"I ain't thinkin' much about him," Wid grunted. "His kind ain't much on fightin' white men!"

"Not fightin' 'em, mebbe," Fletcher warned, "but they're damned nasty with a knife on a dark night! I'd have a feelin', if I was you, that I better step wide an' careful for a day or two!"

"I'm leavin' here soon, Fletcher," Wid agreed. "I'll watch my step on the way over to the hotel. I'll be startin' for your place before the sun is up. But I ain't worryin' over much! That old Cortez gent might 'a' been quite a hell-bender in his day, but this artist guy has forgot it all. There ain't a real fight in 'im!"

"My ranch lays along the Rio Grande, Wid," Fletcher hinted suggestively. "I know these Mexicans. They got a habit o' workin' themselves up a heap—an' in a frenzy they're bad medicine. However, I reckon you're the kind that can look out for yourself."

"Pretty near," Wid answered quietly. "I reckon I know his breed. If he fights at all he'll do it in the dark—an' I'll watch myself in the dark!"

"See you to-morrow," Fletcher smiled, holding forth his hand. "The Lazy M'll be glad to have you."

Wid paused only long enough to thank Elton for getting him the place at the Lazy M, then waved a good night to the men still at the bar. As he passed through the front door he kept a sharp watch of the outer shadows and moved at a rapid pace. The "hotel" at which he had a room was across the street from Elton's dance hall and saloon. His room was on the second floor of the little building and he had left his horse in the stable at the rear.

He had almost gained the entrance to the place when a shot rang out. Something whistled perilously close to his head and he heard the chunk of the bullet as it bit deep into one of the pillars of the hotel ahead of him. Like a flash he crouched low, darted onto the porch and thence into the little room that served as an office.

"That damned greaser is runnin' true to form!" he snarled to himself. "That was a close call!" His hand already was at his pistol and he paused only until some plan of action might present itself to his mind.

A pale-faced clerk stared at him from behind a rough desk.

"What's up?" the man asked in frightened tone. "Who's shootin'?"

Wid was on the point of saying that Miguel Cortez had made an attempt at vengeance when a surprising thing happened. The figure of a man who had been sitting slumped in a chair in one corner of the room rose. He was a tall, slender person and carried himself with a pride that was unmistakable.

"Miguel!" Wid grunted. The Mexican paid not the slightest heed to the utterance. Without a glance in Wid's direction he stalked across the office and toward the side door of the place. Wid was too surprised to question him. Miguel had nearly reached the door when the figure of the old Mexican woman detached itself from the stairs that led aloft and silently shambled after him.

It was easy to see that Miguel had not fired the mysterious shot which had so

nearly finished Wid! The shot had come from the general direction of Bart Elton's place and Miguel had certainly been in the hotel ahead of Wid when it was fired.

"How long's that Mex been in this room?" Wid demanded of the clerk.

"An hour mebbe! He come in here with that old woman just after the fracas over at Bart's. He's been sitting right there ever since. Damn queer folks, them greasers!"

"Not half as queer as some other things!" Wid mused. "I reckon I ain't got any idea who fired that shot, mister . . . not an idea."

Then he walked to the stairs and mounted them. But as he went, there was a deep wrinkle of perplexity across his forehead. It seemed almost theatrical that Miguel should appear at such a propitious moment to prove his innocence. The thing struck Wid as being too well timed; too obvious.

While it was certain that neither Miguel nor the aged woman had fired the shot, Wid was by no means certain that they did not know who had fired it. The whole affair struck him as one well planned. It was typical of the manner of such as Miguel Cortez, he thought.

He had taken his room without blankets and in the corner reposed his own saddle and trappings. The night was not a dark one, and Wid decided against lighting the little oil lamp. In the semi-light of the moon he unstrapped his saddle roll, moved the little table over against the door, then spread his blankets under the table. Thus he was certain that no one could gain entry there without his being roused. The window, being on the second floor, he disregarded in his preparations for the night.

Outside he heard voices drifting from the direction of Elton's and another saloon farther down the narrow street. Now and then he thought he heard loud mention of a shot and presumed that others were attempting to solve the riddle which nonplussed him. They must have heard the explosion and attempted to trace it to its source.

Though Wid shrugged carelessly, he lay a long time in his blankets before sleep came. His thoughts went back over the whole affair. There could be no doubt that the shot was meant to kill him. It had come altogether too close to be a bluff shot, fired with the idea of scaring him. Men could not shoot as accurately as that in semi-darkness.

If, as he believed, the attempt upon his life had been made by a friend of Miguel's, who could that friend be? How could he be traced? Would the men whose inquiring voices had reached him, make a point of checking up on other Mexicans who happened to be in town? Surely no white man would do a thing like that because of an insult offered a greaser!

Slowly the noises of the night died away into an occasional shout as some dilatory celebrant wended an uncertain way toward his blankets. Far out on the prairie a coyote barked its staccato yelp. That was the last Wid heard. His eyes closed in sleep, and it was not until dawn that he awakened.

He smiled a little as he recalled the events of the night before.

"Mebbe I was a fool to butt into that fracas!" he mused as he sought water and a towel. "She ain't nothin' but a dancin' girl an' I 'spose they get used to such things. But damn it all! She's white!"

His breakfast he had in the room used for a dining room. Scarcely had he seated himself when Miguel Cortez entered. His haughty face seemed so set in expression that only his eyes looked alive; the rest of his features might have been a wooden mask.

To Wid's infinite surprise the man walked directly toward him. Wid rose as he approached, his eyes steady and his body flexed to meet possible attack. As if sensing the thoughts of the other, Miguel smiled ever so slightly.

"Be not afraid," he said softly, "I am not here to fight with you! It is not the way of a Cortez to brawl. . . ."

"You be damned!" Wid grated. "I ain't in the habit of eatin' with the likes o' you!"

"Such an honor is not for your kind," Miguel said courageously. "Upon your head rests a curse that you are prone to scoff. Be that as it may. Time will tell. I speak to you because I hear of the attack against you last night. On the word of a Cortez I say to you that I know nothing of it! It is all strange to me."

"You an' your curses, an' your ancestors can take a runnin' jump into hell for all o' me, Miguel!" Wid answered frankly. "Your word ain't worth listenin' to! I know your breed! I know you better'n you know yourselves! I've seen heaps o' you! The best thing you can do is hit the trail outa my sight an' keep out o' it! I'll just leave this thought in your fine, four-hundred-year-old head, though: If any other gent takes a pot at me, I'm goin' to salivate you for it whether you know anything about it or not! Got that straight? Then git!"

Miguel turned without a word and left the room. A man who had been sitting nearby chuckled.

"'Mornin', Wid," he called gruffly. "I was over to Bart's last night an' seen the whole thing. Just after you left we heard a shot an' we went over this town like bloodhounds. Dern funny, too! There ain't another Mex in town but them two! That shot mighta been fired by a white man in mistake—but it sure wasn't fired by a greaser!"

"It was a close squeak, if you ask me," Wid grinned. "Went by my ear like a hoss-fly on a hot day! Miguel was sittin' right in the outside room when I ducked in here. So was that old woman."

"We found that out last night, Wid. Neither o' them fired it. An' it ain't reason'ble that a white man done it for 'em. But somebody sure did an' who that somebody was is a big question!"

"Ain't it, though?" Wid agreed. "I'd like right well to know who!"

"You sure told Miguel a thing or two just now," the other man continued in a pleased tone. "I reckon you handled these greasers before, Wid? That's the only way to keep 'em in their places!"

Wid made as if to answer, then changed his mind and gave his undivided attention to the meal which had been set before him during the second conversation. The stranger did not press matters further, and when Wid finished eating he rolled a smoke, rose and, after grunting to his acquaintance, went outside and saddled his pony.

At the desk he talked again with the timid clerk.

"Here's your coin for that room an' meals," he said, tossing a bill on the desk. "An' my forwardin' address is the Lazy M Ranch. I'm goin' out there to ride for Martin Fletcher. I'm only tellin' you this so's any curses that happen to roam in here, or any greaser ghosts that call lookin' fer me, you can tell 'em where I am!"

He laughed gently at the surprised look on the man's face, accepted his change and walked out of the place. Miguel Cortez was standing on the porch as Wid passed. He glared silently but made no move or effort to speak. Wid grinned, then, as if intent upon enraging the man all possible, half-turned and spoke to him:

"When that greaser curse gits up to a workin' heat, Miguel," he sneered, "it can find me out at the Lazy M."

Then he swung into the saddle and started southwest. The sun had not yet risen, so he expected to find Fletcher at the ranch house.

The look that Miguel sent after him was not good to see.

CHAPTER III

The Lazy M

THE heat of the day had not yet come when Wid caught first sight of the great ranch house at the Lazy M. His pony had fallen quickly into the easy lope that marks the plains horse, and distance melted rapidly away under his flying hoofs.

The place was a good deal as Wid had imagined it would be. Eight or ten buildings ranging in size from tool houses to the main ranch house completed the layout. The house itself was huge. Although but one story high, it was long and wide, and the main rooms of the place were almost as large as Bart Elton's dance hall.

Fletcher was prosperous, as could be seen at a single glance. Wid had a feeling that fortune had played him a kindly trick in opening the way to employment on the big ranch. Several riders favored him with curious glances as he approached, and each of them, he noted, waved a friendly greeting.

Martin Fletcher was on the low porch when Wid reined in and slid from the sad-

dle. He came forward with hand extended and a smile on his face. His heavy voice boomed a greeting:

"We'll go inside, Wid. I'll get Murray Wilson, the foreman, an' we'll have a visit before you hit the saddle for the Lazy M." The manner of Fletcher pleased Wid immensely. He had liked the rancher the moment he met him, but now he felt that first feeling expanding into a true admiration for him. Fletcher was obviously sincere and square.

It so happened that Murray Wilson showed himself to be of the same stamp.

"This is Wid Samuels, Murray," Fletcher introduced when the foreman appeared in answer to his summons. "I was tellin' you about him this mornin'."

"Hello, Wid," Murray smiled, shaking hands. "Call me Murray."

"You an' me is goin' to be friends, Murray," Wid responded frankly.

"If we ain't it'll be your fault, Wid! Martin has been tellin' me about what happened last night down to Bart Elton's—I liked you before I even seen you!"

Wid smiled.

"More'n he knows about happened, I reckon. By the way, Fletcher—how come you got out here so early? Did you ride out last night?"

Fletcher and Wilson exchanged quick glances, then the rancher answered:

"Yeah. I rode out last night, Wid! Did somethin' happen after I left?"

Wid saw that the man did not care to talk of his own movements the night before, so did not press for further information. However, he made mental note of the fact that Fletcher and his foreman were deliberately keeping something between themselves and when he answered it was with that in mind.

"Yep. Somebody tried to salivate me when I left Elton's place!"

"Who?" Fletcher demanded a little tensely.

"I wish I knew!" Wid grunted. "I figgered at first it was that greaser. But it wasn't! I ducked into the hotel an' found him sittin' there. The clerk said he hadn't been out o' the place in an hour. The old woman was with him, too."

Once again the rancher and foreman exchanged quick understanding glances. Though Wid affected not to see, he did not miss the fact and in his mind there were born vague doubts. What did these men know that he did not? Why had Martin Fletcher been so willing to make a place for him at the Lazy M.?

"I heard the shot," the rancher was saying, "but I was just saddlin' up an' I didn't wait to see what was goin' on."

"You in the habit o' ridin' back an' forth at night, Fletcher?" Wid asked somewhat impudently.

"Nope," Fletcher laughed. "Not in the habit, exackly. We all do it some, though. I went in last night to see a gent on business. I had to git back out here to attend to some things this mornin', that's all."

"It ain't any o' my business," Wid hastened to offer as a sort of apology for his query, "but, me bein' damn near killed, I'm right anxious to get to the bottom o' things!"

"That's natural, I reckon," Fletcher answered. "Wid, you're the fightin' kind, anybody could see that. What I'd like to know is where you come from—an' why!"

"I thought I was already hired?"

"I ain't askin' this for references," Fletcher said. Wid saw that the rancher also winked a suggestive eye, and he determined that he had stumbled upon a trail that was certain to lead to strange places if he could but pursue it. "I'm askin' to find out! I'm thinkin' you don't care much about just a job, after all!"

"Yeah? Huh!" Wid was thinking as fast as he could. Events had moved with a confusing rapidity and he felt that a false step might destroy all that seemed, now, to be in his favor. "I reckon you got some idees I don't even suspect, Fletcher," he countered warily.

Fletcher laughed his great, booming laugh again. His brawny hand reached forth and gripped Wid's shoulder and his eyes met Wid's in a frank stare that was not to be denied. Wid grinned.

"Speak out, Wid!" Fletcher urged. "You don't care a damn fer this job, do you?"

"I sure do!" Wid avowed earnestly. "It'd

break my heart to lose the chance! You got me wrong, Fletcher, somehow. I ain't a thing on earth but a good cowhand—gamble on that!"

A look of surprised doubt crossed Fletcher's face and he glanced again at Wilson. Both men showed that they were mystified by Wid's last words.

"Then why did you butt in on Miguel Cortez las' night?" the rancher queried.

"I don't like his breed," Wid responded readily. "I've seen a lot o' his kind—they're bad medicine. When he asked that gal for a kiss I knew he didn't want the kiss! He was just sneerin' at all white folks an' that riled me!"

"I got your word on that, Wid?" Fletcher persisted.

"From the drop o' the hat! I give you my word."

"Then what brought you to town at just this time?"

"That there is a personal affair," Wid sighed a little. "If I leave things there, you'll be wonderin' forever what kind o' a deal I mean, so I don't mind goin' a bit farther with you gents if you'll agree to keep it under your sombreros. . ."

"Agreed!" Fletcher urged, with the air of a man who feels that barriers are being set aside and truth and understanding about to be revealed.

"You bet!" Wilson concurred.

"Well," Wid said uneasily, "it was a gal! She threw me down. I ain't made up my mind yet whether I was lucky or not! But I knowed I couldn't stay around where she was without havin' folks grinnin' at me. I reckon it's cause I was moonstruck that I made that greaser apologize to that dancin' gal! Gals look a bit—queer to me, right now——"

"My Gawd!" Fletcher grunted, "is that all there is to it, Wid, honest? You actually mean what you say?"

"Ain't that enough?" Wid asked somewhat sharply.

"I reckon—I'm plumb sorry you got jammed up in a love affair—but I thought we was goin' to learn somethin' that lays right close to us, just now!"

"Who was you expectin' in town?" Wid asked shrewdly. "I can tell you was expectin' somebody an' you figgered I was the party."

"Not exackly expectin' 'em," Fletcher corrected, "but I admit we been thinkin' somebody might come along——"

"Look like me, does he?"

"We never seen 'im. We had it figgered he might show up an' not let anybody know he was in town," Fletcher said in disappointed tone.

"I reckon he musta been a marshal or a deputy," Wid allowed casually.

"You might as well know, Wid," Fletcher declared. "Knowin' as much as you do, you'd ask questions o' others an' let the cat outa the bag, mebbe. It's all secret, see? We was expectin' a Ranger—one o' the new Texas Rangers. We sent word to the Capital that he was needed here less'n they wanted us to cut loose on our own hook!"

"An' you thought I was him?" Wid asked.

"Yep. It was natural enough to think so! You're a stranger. You're the fightin' kind an' you grab the first chance that offers to let folks know it!"

"Well—I tell you again, on my word, that I ain't nobody but plain Wid Samuels, a kinda roamin' Romeo what's givin' up Romeoin' an' took to roamin'. An' that goes. However, I ain't backward about mixin' up in a fracas if this here gent don't show up in time!"

Both men laughed, but in their tone was a good deal of disappointment. It was clear that they had expected him to be that which he was not and their disappointment was too keen not to be evident in their manner. It was Wilson who finally spoke.

"It's all right, Wid," he said, "you can't help bein' what you are, that's a cinch—an' the more I think things over the more I feel like mebbe it's better this way."

"How come, Murray?" Fletcher queried.

"Well—I'll tell you, Martin," the foreman went on, "I like Wid here! He's branded as plain as a steer an' by that I mean he carries the stamp o' a man! I'm fer tellin' him just what the situation is. He's a stranger here an' he might be able to pick up some things we can't!"

Fletcher seemed to be pondering the words of the foreman and Wid, his curi-

osity and sense of adventure roused to the fever point, nevertheles had the good sense to maintain a strict silence. After a moment the rancher spoke.

"I'm for that, Murray," he said slowly. "My job's been pickin' men fer a good many years. I picked you, I picked a lot o' others, an' I reckon I know a man when I meets up with one. Wid here's a man. The only reason I hold off is 'cause I ain't sure I wanna drag a man into a thing like this. It's apt to be rough goin' when the storm breaks——"

"Don't worry none about that, Fletcher," Wid cut in impetuously. "If you ain't never been turned down by yore best gal you ain't got the least idee what a sweet thing a fight can be! Put me down for it —an' the rougher the better!"

"All right, Wid," Fletcher agreed then. "First off, you're workin' fer me. You're on my payroll right now. You're hired as a rider just like everybody else, but ridin' herd ain't goin' to be your job!

"To come to the point, we been losin' cattle! There's the sleekest gang o' rustlers 'round here I ever heard of! They been runnin' our cattle for three months an' we ain't really got a line on 'em yet!

"You gotta remember that we're within twenty miles o' the border at the Mexican line. Cross the river an' you're in Mexico, an' the river borders about nine runnin' miles o' our land. It'd be easy fer rustlers to ford the river at half a dozen points either on or off our land—but they don't do it!

"The cattle seem to go up in the air! First we got 'em—then we ain't. We watch the fords, we go over the river banks for forty miles in each direction—an' can't locate a trail that means a thing!"

Fletcher paused as though to let the import of his words impress itself more deeply upon Wid. Before he continued Wid interrupted:

"That's right queer. They drive these cattle over the line, ford the river somewhere within reason'ble distance—an' never leave no trail?"

"It sounds damned foolish," Fletcher grunted, "but it's the truth as shore as you're born."

"You the only one losin' cattle?" Wid asked.

"So far as we know—yes. Tobe Jefford says he can't exackly tell till he rounds up fer brandin' an' shippin'—but he knows it's only a question o' time afore they begin on him an' he's doin' all he kin to help locate the crooks! That makes it all the worse, in a way!

"Tobe's land bumps mine for about three miles o' river front an' between us we keep a close watch day an' night. But we ain't ever learned a dern thing."

Wid thought matters over carefully through several moments of utter silence. Fletcher, he knew, was not the kind to exaggerate such a matter. Any idea which might present to his mind must predicate itself upon the knowledge that Fletcher's account of things was true. There seemed to be mighty little to go on, Wid decided.

"How long you known this Tobe Jefford?" he asked pointedly.

"Four or five years," Fletcher said. "That ain't a new line o' thought with us, Wid! I hates to admit suspectin' a gent o' a deal like that—but we got to a point where we'd suspect everybody. Murray an' me watched Tobe's boundary for three weeks. Durin' that time not a steer crossed the river an' yet we lost near a hundred head as well as we could count 'em!"

"Damn funny thing!" Wid agreed vehemently. After that there was another prolonged silence. During that time Fletcher and Wilson assumed the attitude of men who have presented for solution a mystery that cannot be solved. Much as they sought the secret that was costing them a moderate fortune, they actually seemed pleased with the hopelessness of their situation and Wid's helplessness before it. Finally Wid asked:

"You ain't never growed any calves with wings, has you?"

"Nope. Not that we seen, Wid," Murray assured him. "But the way they get away from us without leavin' a trail makes it look like they can fly, after all!"

"They ain't flyin'," Wid growled. "You can lay a gamble on that. They're walkin'. Walkin' right off under yore noses—an' somebody's showin' 'em how to do it without leavin' no trail!"

"Gawd knows they're the best I ever heard of!" Fletcher grumbled feelingly.

"Answer me another question, Fletcher," Wid urged. "Tell me why you was in town last night."

"Bart Elton sent word that you was there. He thought you was a Ranger, too."

"Then Bart knows the whole story?"

"Yeah."

"You trust him?"

"I don't only trust him, Wid, I'd swear to him! Bart Elton owns a good share in this ranch!" Fletcher assured them.

"Well, already I begin to see a coupla things better, Fletcher!" Wid finally said. "In the first place—Bart Elton spotted me for a stranger and thought I was this Ranger, huh? Well, if he did somebody else might have too! The truth is—somebody else did!"

"What!" Fletcher exploded. "How'd you know that, Wid? What makes you think so? We kept that thing a secret as shore as you're a foot high!"

"O' course, Fletcher, I don't know nothin' definite," Wid said, "but I do know greasers pretty good an' I got a hunch that Miguel Cortez told the truth for once in his life, when he said he didn't know who took that shot at me!"

"You mean—you think Cortez knows about these cattle losses? We've kept the thing an absolute secret, I tell you, Wid!"

Wid smiled again. "It's a cinch, Fletcher," he offered then, "that you ain't kept it a secret from the rustlers that stole 'em!"

"Cortez! Hell, man! Impossible!" Wilson snapped.

"Sure! Mebbe so," Wid agreed. "I ain't sayin' Cortez stole the cattle! I'm sayin' that whoever did steal knows as well as you do that they was stole! An' such gents knows that you're goin' to do somethin' about it, too! It's a good bet you ain't goin' to sit by an' give your herd away just 'cause you can't find tracks where they was drove across the river!"

"But you said Cortez——" Fletcher interjected.

"I said Cortez told the truth when he said he didn't know who shot at me! What I mean is this: If Elton knew you had sent away for a man—an' the rustlers suspected you might do that—then we gotta forget all about Cortez bein' responsible for that shot at me! Forget his greaser curse! The gent what tried to salivate me an' blame it on Cortez, was some gent who suspected me o' bein' just what you an' Bart Elton thought I was. A Ranger!

"An' it's a damned good bet, if you ask me, that he's the gent, or one o' them, that's runnin' your cattle over the skyline!"

"Somebody took you for a Ranger an' tried to put you outa the way!" Fletcher gasped in sudden understanding.

"That was my idee," Wid admitted casually. "An' seein' as you an' Bart are the only ones as knows about the Ranger bein' sent for or the cattle bein' stole—then the gent what fired at me is pretty apt to be the gent who stole the cattle! That ain't bad reasonin', is it?

"It sure ain't, Wid!" Wilson said grimly. "The thing we gotta do now is to ride into town, Martin, an' do a little checkin' up on what happened last night."

"They didn't find out a thing," Wid grunted. "A feller was tellin' me this mornin' that they combed the town lookin' for more greasers an' they never even got a trace o' the shooter!"

CHAPTER IV

The Faded Face

THE three men talked until noon, when they were interrupted by the clanging of the huge bell which called all hands to the table. There Wid made another discovery which enhanced the good will he already felt toward Fletcher. All the men who were at the ranch house dined with the family at one great table. Mrs. Fletcher, a gray-haired old lady as small and dainty as Fletcher was great and booming, presided over the board.

As they left to enter the dining room Wid gave his decision tersely.

"We can talk all night, gents," he said, "an' be no nearer the facts when we git through. Better leave me to find out what I can fer a few days. Let me start out ridin' the range an' who knows but I'll run across somethin' you mighta missed? It's

new country to me—it's old to you. You're so used to things you might not notice somethin' that I'd see!"

"You find anythin' on this ranch an' you're a beaut," Wilson told him confidently. "But go to it, so far as I'm concerned. I'll tell the gang you're out lookin' over the grazin'. Take your own time an' if you want anythin' come in for't."

"That's O.K. with me," Fletcher assented readily. "I like your style an' I got a hunch you know the cow business. If there's anythin' to be found I believe you'll help us find it."

"All I do know is a few things about ranchin', Fletcher," Wid answered.

"But you better look out fer greaser curses!" Murray Wilson laughed. "They mos' allus come like a knife in the dark. Queer 'speerits', they are!"

Then they entered the dining room and Wid was made known to Mrs. Fletcher and all of the riders present. He was able to absorb the spirit of fellowship that seemed to have permeated the entire organization.

He could see that Fletcher was no more popular than Wilson and he credited the foreman a great deal on that score. It had been his experience that popularity came hard for a foreman, no matter how much he might try to be fair.

"You got a great place here, Mrs. Fletcher," he smiled at the lady. "I feel plumb to home, all ready to work an' proud to be one o' you!"

The lady accepted his statement with thanks and, in turn, assured him that everything would be done to make his work happy for him. From her words he could see that she knew nothing of the things which were worrying her husband. Fletcher had doubtless kept such things from her, he thought.

But immediately after dinner he went to Fletcher's office and carefully scanned the range maps showing just what was Lazy M property. After getting the boundaries firmly established in his mind he nodded in satisfaction and held forth his hand to the big rancher.

"I reckon I'm right happy I met up with you, Fletcher," he said. "This here sort o' thing sets right good with me, somehow. I like it! First off, I'll be headin' for the river an' I'll just take a good long look at both banks——"

"Watch yourself on the other side!" Fletcher hastened to warn him. "With Cortez feelin' toward you like he does, you don't want to cross up with him on his side o' the river! I know how that gang work. The very greasers that might throw a knife at you from a bush hate him, it's true. But they'll kill for him 'cause he's a Cortez an', even though he's broke an' got no more power'n an armadillo, they still look up to the name!"

"I'll keep my eye open, Fletcher. Somehow, I don't scare much over a Mex. There ain't no tellin' just how long I'll be gone, o' course, but I'll swear to this: If there's a trail on either side o' that stream, I'll find it!"

"I reckon you will, Wid," Fletcher frankly voiced his opinion. "At first I was plumb disappointed when you turned out to be nobody but a roamin'—who was that?"

"Romeo," Wid assented. "But that there's as secret as the stuff you told me!"

"Locked tight in here!" Fletcher said heavily, at the same time thumping his deep chest in melodramatic manner. Wid smiled in appreciation of the humor. "An' good luck to you, Wid," Fletcher went on. "I've got all over that disappointment. I reckon you're a godsend to us!"

The sun was high and hot when Wid swung into the saddle again. His saddlebags were full; he was ready to remain on the range for two weeks if necessary. Leaning over to Fletcher who had followed him to his pony as though giving him final instruction, Wid said:

"If that Ranger gent does show up, you better tell 'em I'm out here an' describe me to him."

"I'll do it, Wid—an' good luck," Fletcher repeated. "See if you can't locate these here flyin' cattle o' our'n!"

The sun was sinking fast when Wid found himself at the river. The ride had been a hot one but it had afforded oppor-

tunity for a lot of thinking. Wid was certain that, if he looked closely enough, he must certainly find a trail where fifty or a hundred steers had passed at one driving. No matter how cleverly vaqueros might attempt to cover such a trail, he felt confident that keen eyes could detect it.

The range maps at Fletcher's office were accurate as to boundary, he soon discovered; but the nature of the country had not been depicted and Wid began to realize that therein lay food for thought.

He came upon the river from an eminence. He had been aware that the pony had been gradually climbing from the low, flat plains that surrounded the ranch house, but that such altitude as he now found had been attained, was surprising to him. The broad, yellow stream ran at least a hundred feet below him.

The banks down to it were steep and bore the marks of the rushing torrent that the river became in the early spring. Then it was that no one might hope to ford. Now, the river had a placid, sluggish appearance and Wid rather pictured it as a sleeping monster.

He could see that the water was extremely low and every indication was that a prolonged dry spell had passed. This he rathed welcomed in view of the task before him. For in shrinking back from the banks the water had left a wide ribbon of ground so soggy that it was almost marsh land. Wid felt certain that no one man or group of men could drive a herd of cattle over such ground and not leave unmistakable traces.

He put his pony to the bank. The dry ground underfoot gave off a fine alkali dust that bit into the membrane of the nostrils, settled like a torment on the perspiring eyelids of man and horse alike. Wid looked behind him and smiled in satisfaction at the trail his pony left.

"Go to it, hoss," he muttered. "If any gents has drove steers over ground like this within the last ten years—I'm goin' to know it. How could they miss it? Gee!"

On the bank of the river he found a sheltered spot where the steep bank towered above him. He dismounted and looked over his pony.

"The sun's still right high, hoss," he grunted. "It can't do neither o' us any hurt to splash a bit. Lord knows we won't be much cleaner!" with a dubious glance at the muddy stream, "but we may be cooler an' we won't git cold dryin' off!"

He unsaddled, the pony standing in typical air of dejected exhaustion. After efficiently arranging his trappings for the purpose of camping, he stripped off his clothes. The soft mud of the water's edge oozed between his toes and he smiled again.

"Come on, hoss, follow me in fer a coolin bath . . . only a blind man could miss a trail through stuff like this!"

Man and horse wallowed in the gratefully cool water. Possibly ten minutes they spent thus, then Wid returned to the bank, secured from his saddlebags an aluminum basin and folding cup, and filled them with the muddy water. These he stood on the ground and then began to hunt for dried wood. When his fire was ready the water in the kettles had cleared. The sediment of mud lay on the bottom of the utensils.

From this he drank, poured water for coffee, and cooked his evening meal. Through the hours following actual sunset and complete darkness, he sat smoking and thinking. He had tethered his horse nearby and now and then he ventured a remark in the general direction of the animal.

Finally, when darkness had come and stars were peeping through the canopy overhead, he snapped his cigarette far out over the river. His eyes followed it as it sailed through the air; up and out it went, as though struggling to remain aloft and avoid the sluggish stream beneath it. Then it began to sink and he heard it strike the water with a faint sizzling sound. It died.

And with its death Wid sat suddenly erect, every nerve alert, strained, his ears fairly bursting with the intentness of his listening. For a strange sound had come to him. A sound that was foreign to the soft whisper of the plains night; the sharp, staccato bark of the prairie dog; the ceaseless murmur of the sluggish river. What he had heard was a distant shot!

For many seconds he sat, listening. But only the night sounds greeted his ears; the

endless tumult of gentle noises that blends itself into the prairie silence. But the sound of the shot remained with him, like a mental photograph imprinted upon his consciousness. He was perfectly certain that he had heard it, that it was no trick of imagination.

Rising, he went to his pony. Quickly he packed his gear and saddled. The horse, prepared for a night of rest after a day in the hot sun, seemed fretful. But Wid was determined to trace the eerie and ominous sound which had disturbed his planning.

He was certain that it came from down the river. As nearly as he could place the direction and distance whence the sound of the shot came, it was at a point about a mile south.

The pony, under insistent urging, clambered up the steep bank again and Wid touched its flanks with the spurs. It was cooler going through the night and to aid them the moon peered over the horizon and shed a soft light to illumine their way. Chancing the danger of prairie-dog holes, Wid kept the pony at a keen gallop for what he figured a half mile. Then he reined him in a little and peered sharply ahead for signs of life.

It was not long before they came. A short distance ahead, and down the bank to the edge of the river, there appeared a faint glow against the background of night. Immediately Wid hobbled his pony and went on afoot. The glow was a campfire.

In a very few minutes he had crept to a point above the fire and lay prone looking down upon the solitary camp. To all intents and purposes the place was exactly as it should be. A small fire was burning; on the air hung a faint aroma of food; beside the fire lay the form of a man sleeping. He was rolled in his blankets, his feet toward the tiny and flickering blaze.

For many minutes Wid watched. The sluggish river purred contentedly past the still form in the blankets. The fire sputtered now and then, in its dying struggles. Shadows about the place steadily grew deeper and deeper.

Suddenly a terrible thought occurred to Wid. Was that still form in the blankets really sleeping? Or had the shot which he had heard stilled it forever?

Very cautiously, gun drawn and clenched tight and ready for quick action, Wid slid over the dusty bank, down through the clinging sage and cactus, until he was at the river's edge. The fire sputtered again and cast a sudden but passing glow over the ground. After the momentary flare the camp was darker than ever.

With eyes darting in all directions and every nerve alert to meet sudden attack, Wid crept forward. He gained the side of the prone figure, reached forth and shook the man's shoulder. When no response greeted the move he seized the blanket and drew it aside. A hoarse mutter crossed his lips:

"Dead! Killed, by Gawd, while he slept."

There could be no doubting the exactness of Wid's diagnosis. The face that stared up into his own was that of a man whose earthly sojourn has found its end. It was not a pleasant sight to see. Yet the story told was as clear as though printed upon the pages of a book. The man had been asleep. Some cowardly assassin had crept upon him through the night. As he slept, that assassin had placed a gun against his head and fired the shot which Wid had heard.

Staggered as he was by the terrible discovery he had made, Wid did not permit himself to lose his power of thought or action. It was evident that not over ten minutes had elapsed since the time the shot had been fired and the time he arrived at the strange camp. It naturally followed that the killer was but a short distance away.

If the man would deliberately murder a sleeping rider, he would certainly have no hesitancy about shooting at Wid were he to see him! After making certain that the man in the camp was beyond earthly aid, Wid withdrew into the shadows and started along the river bank toward his horse.

He had taken but a step or two when the fire offered its last flicker of life. A dancing light crossed Wid's path. It was but a passing illumination, a transitory flash that might have been the offering of an out-

raged Fate. But it sufficed to attract his attention to something that lay ahead of him. It was a small paper; one that lay in the muddy bank as though recently dropped. He picked it up, attempted to look at it, then gave up in the poor light.

But he slipped it into his shirt and darted for the cover of the bank. He regained the place where he had left his pony without incident. For a few moments he tood pondering matters. What ought he to do? It was evident that he could not hope to follow the trail of the murderer until daylight, and that was many hours away!

After careful thought he decided to withdraw a mile or two and camp. That would allow both himself and his mount to rest.

"To-morrow may be a hell o' a day, hoss!" he said as they swung through the night. "First off, we'll get a bite to eat at dawn, then we'll come back to this poor devil an' see what we can learn. The chances are ten to one that he's a Lazy M rider, an' if that's so—mebbe hell has been poppin' agin'—and steers flyin' across the river this very night!"

But since the morrow threatened big things with endless exactions upon human energies, Wid soon dismissed all thought of what had just taken place and, after a careful scurrying around to chase away any rattlers that might have intended sharing his camp site with him, he rolled into his blankets and slept without even the advantage of a fire.

Dawn was gray when he rose. Before the real light of day arrived he was finished with his breakfast and was ready to go. There was no need to reach the death camp before dawn. He would want light to read signs that may have been left, and to identify the rider who lay there beside the singing river.

Then he thought suddenly of the paper he had found near the scene of the killing the night before. He reached into his shirt and withdrew it. It was mud-stained, a little crinkled from contact with water. But he smoothed it out over his knee and quickly saw that it carried faint lines rather than writing.

"By the livin' lizards!" he gasped, after a moment's scrutiny. "It's her! It's . . . well, I'm damned!"

Blurred a little, crinkled with the touch of the water, but yet clear enough to leave doubt impossible, the lines on that paper took form as day dawned. They shaped themselves into a face; the sweet face of Butterfly Rose!

Eagerly Wid turned the sheet over. On the reverse side was indisputable proof. There loomed, more clearly because less stained by contact with the ground, the face which Miguel Cortez had drawn first, then shaded into the face of age and dissipation!

"It's the same sheet—the same pic'ter!" Wid uttered. "An' how did it git out here? Miguel? . . . Whoever killed that rider dropped this paper while he was doin' it! . . . An' the last one to have the paper was the gal herself, Butterfly Rose!"

CHAPTER V

Blocked Trails

WID gave that soiled paper a lot of thought, none of which seemed to get him anywhere. It served, however, to recall poignantly the scene at Bart Elton's. He saw once more the leering face of Miguel Cortez as he presented the sketch to Butterfly Rose and insolently named his price for it.

He remembered that the girl had held the paper while he and Miguel struggled, and that it was still in her hand, crumpled a little from the clutch of her fingers, when the Mexican apologized. Then how had it come out here on Lazy M property to lay, as damning evidence, in a cowardly murder?

"First," Wid muttered, "I gotta find out just who this dead rider is. It may be that him an' Butterfly Rose was lovers. If that don't lead me anywhere, then I gotta find out what the gal was doin' last night. If she can clear herself there is left only Miguel—an' it ain't his kind o' a job, somehow! I can't picture him with the courage to sneak up to a fire an' kill."

The camp and the silent rider remained undisturbed when Wid reached them. Along the bank were fresh footprints of

roaming coyotes and Wid shuddered a little as he contemplated them. It was borne in upon him that the laws of life are ever heedless of the edict of death; living things, he thought, were predatory creatures whose prey were those less strong.

A brief but careful survey of the camp taught him several things, none of which were really of importance to the main issue. He did not know the rider; the man's pony bore the Lazy M brand and he was, therefore, one of Fletcher's hands.

Next, the killer had left a perfectly plain trail which told absolutely nothing except the course which he had taken. That is, it told nothing by which the man might be identified. It did prove, Wid thought, that the girl was exonerated because the imprint in the dust was heavier than she would have made; it was a wider mark, too.

Again, it showed Wid with all too great a clarity the hardened type with whom he must deal if he followed his mission to its end. The killer was callous; of the type who was not in the least unnerved by the killing he had done. With great care he had scraped his feet as he walked and thus his trail was merely a succession of blotches that were indistinctly defined; easy to follow to the obliterating water, but meaningless past what Wid already knew.

"Damn clever!" Wid grunted in exasperation. "But this ain't the end, mister! I got a hunch the best way to trail you is that pic'ter—an' that's what I'll do!"

He saddled the dead rider's horse and managed to lay the limp figure of the man over the animal's back. Then began a slow, silent march toward the ranch house which Wid had left such a short time before. If Fate had been a little more kindly, if Wid had struck the river at a point a mile farther south, if any one of a dozen little things might have happened differently, then that silent figure might still be alive.

Because of the slow pace maintained the sun had climbed high again before the two rode into the corral. Fletcher came to meet them and his face paled at what he saw. The light in his eyes became less genial and his chin set as though suddenly clamped by the hand of paralysis.

"Poor Jim!" he said slowly . . . "a damn fine feller, Wid! Jim Quigley—an' there never was a whiter one born! Tell me about it."

Briefly Wid related the tale and between them they carried the body of Quigley inside.

It was impossible to keep such an affair from Mrs. Fletcher and the appearance they made roused many vague suspicions which had been bothering her. In a quiet yet persistent way she dragged from Fletcher the whole story.

As she did so other riders stood about and Wid could see by their faces that emotions boding ill for the mysterious rustlers were being born in that room. When the story was done Mrs. Fletcher showed a courage and fortitude that was surprising. She bathed the battered face of Quigley, arranged with two of the riders to array the man in his best, then announced a burial service for that evening.

Silence that was sepulchral fell over the ranch. Even the calves that were penned in the west corral seemed affected by the gruesome presence, and men walked about the place like shadows. Only an occasional word, a cough, broke the silence. But Wid saw that every man had found that within him which set his face grimly and kindled in his eyes a fire that lived on the fuel of purposefulness.

In the quiet of the afternoon Fletcher, Wilson and Wid met again and went over the new developments. Wid repeated his story in detail, then told of the finding of the sketch which Miguel Cortez had made of Butterfly Rose. The two men showed the keenest interest.

"I've already sent two riders out onto Quigley's range," the rancher announced. "If them rustlers was workin' last night then cattle is missin'! The boys should be back in three-four hours with news on that point. I'm thinkin' it might be a good idee to send a man to see Bart an' have him find out where every one o' these three were last night! The gal, the old woman an' Cortez!"

"I was goin' to ask you to do that, Fletcher," Wid said. "It's the quickest way to get at facts, I reckon. I admit I'm stumped. I'd swear the gal never made that

trail, but she might have had a man with 'er that did—after she got Quigley!

"The old woman mighta done it—but the trail was lost in the water so quick that I figgered a hoss was on the other side an' a clever rider had lost hisself pronto. As for Miguel—damned if I think he'd have the nerve to do it!"

"But that pic'ter narrows the thing down a heap, Wid!" Murray Wilson persisted. "It traveled right fast. It musta been out here about as quick as you were—who could 'a' brought it? The gal had it last!"

"Send a man to town, Fletcher," Wid snapped. "Make him hit the trail with all he's got an' git there pronto. Have him work through Bart Elton an' learn where them three were last night. Also, an' this counts most o' all with me, make that gal tell what she did with the pic'ter!"

Without a word Fletcher rose and executed the plan. In less than five minutes the messenger thundered past the porch and they watched him through the window as he lay quirt to his pony and flashed across the plains.

"He's ridin'," Murray suggested softly. "The boys is plumb riled up now! Jim's killin'—an' the way it was did . . ."

"We won't lack help if it comes to that!" Fletcher growled ominously.

"Fightin' is easy enough when you know what you're fightin'," Wid offered dubiously.

"We got a lot to go on just the same," Fletcher allowed. "That pic'ter was a lucky find, Wid. I'm wonderin' if it wouldn't been a good idee to hang around Jim's camp till the thing was missed? The killer, not knowin' you was around, might 'a' come back for it."

"Mebbe so," Wid agreed, "but I wasn't deliberately waitin' round to git myself shot up a heap!"

With both messengers started there seemed little more that the three could do till word was received from them. Wid rolled himself a smoke and puffed in silence. Mrs. Fletcher sent for her husband and when the man returned his eyes were misty as he announced that the funeral service was completely arranged.

His cigarette finished, Wid stepped on to the porch and cast the stub away. His eyes, reflecting impatience, roved over the horizon in the direction whence the first two riders were most apt to return. Far away he saw a horseman heading toward the ranch. He watched a moment, hopes high that word was coming. Then he returned to the room with the others.

"Somebody's comin' hell-bent," he said tersely.

Both men rose and went to the porch. The rancher shaded his eyes with his hat and watched the approaching figure intently for several moments.

"Can you make him out, Martin?" the foreman queried.

"I may be wrong," Fletcher said, "but the gait o' that hoss looks a heap like Tobe Jefford's to me."

"I was thinkin' the same," Murray agreed. "He's sure got some news—comin' through the sun at a pace like that!"

"It's Tobe, awright!" Fletcher nodded as the rider drew closer.

There seemed a tensity born of the fact that the neighboring rancher was coming to the Lazy M. It was evident to the waiting men that their neighbor had learned something and that it was important enough to send him through the heat of the day at a killing pace. They waited in silence, Fletcher finally waving his hat in premature greeting. Jefford answered with a sweep of the arm and in a moment pulled his horse to a sliding stop and leaped from the saddle before them.

"It's come, by Gawd!" he snapped angrily. "They've run off my cattle, Martin! Las' night—as near as I can tell about twenty head!"

Wid watched the man as he spoke. He was typical of his kind in that his features bore the tan of wind and sun, his legs were bowed by constant riding and his voice carried the tang of the plains in both resonance and ennunciation.

"So they're after yourn, now, eh Tobe?" Fletcher repeated when they were inside again. "Well, they done us a damn sight worse than cattle, las' night! They murdered pore Jim Quigley while he slept!"

"Hell's fire!" Jefford roared, rising excitedly from the chair into which he had

sunk. "Murdered him! Yore plumb sure?"

"Wid, here, brought him in this mornin'."

"Wid? Who's Wid?" Jefford demanded quickly.

"Wid's me," the new rider spoke affably. "You're Tobe Jefford an' I'm right glad to meet up with you."

The greeting was friendly and Jefford accepted Wid's extended hand, but it was plain that he was dubious.

"You ain't——?" he spoke as though a sudden idea had presented itself to his mind and his glance at Fletcher was obviously one of secret query.

"I ain't nobody but Wid Samuels, if that's what you was goin' to ask."

"He ain't a Ranger, Tobe," Fletcher said. "We thought he was at first, too."

"Just a new cowhand, I reckon?" Jefford persisted.

"New here," Wid agreed, "I been a puncher a long time."

Jefford fell into a muse from which he seemed suddenly to emerge like a sea lion through the placid surface of a calm sea.

"An' you found Quigley murdered, huh? Damn queer! Was you ridin' with him?"

"I never even knew he was alive!" Wid snapped coldly. "I reckon I git the drift o' your thoughts plenty!"

"A man's got a right to think, young feller!" Jefford returned testily. "This thing has gone a long ways with us, ain't it, Martin? Damned if I wouldn't suspect my own brother! An' I've allus said Martin went too easy with things! The time has come fer he-men to defend their prop'ty, I says!"

The outburst was greeted by silence from the others and during the interim Jefford sank again into his chair.

"Poor Quigley," he grunted. "Shot him while he was asleep, huh? Got any idee who to look up, Martin?"

The others listened in silence while Fletcher repeated in detail Wid's story. Jefford evinced the keenest interest and when mention of the picture was made he interrupted.

"That damned greaser is at the bottom o' all this, Martin!" he assured them. "A wily Mex he is, if you ask me!"

But the fullest exchange of ideas and information seemed to leave them no better off than at first. Jefford was all for forming a joint posse and scouring the country with guns ready to speak in place of words or laws. Fletcher counselled against this on the score that such things bred deep and lasting hatreds and would set the country back years in progress and prosperity.

"If we stand pat now, Tobe, we show our faith in the law," he said. "That's what's needed here, now. Once the law wins the end is always right."

"There's some things the law can't touch!" Jefford growled. "By the time it gits 'round to doin' somethin', I'll be broke!"

But Fletcher definitely vetoed the posse idea because, he said, there was no way to act legally in that manner until an unmistakable trail was picked up and cold proof gained against those who were guilty.

Mrs. Fletcher did not appear for lunch and Wid guessed that this was a rare piece of foresight on the part of the rancher. With the lady there the men would not have spoken their minds, a thing which Wid knew they were anxious to do.

Jefford talked freely. He reiterated his belief that something should be done jointly and that explanations could be made after the rightness of their course had been proven. Fletcher took the opposite view and stated that, inasmuch as he was the greatest loser and the men worked for him, he looked for absolute and implicit obedience from them.

In the natural course of events the talk switched to the killing of Quigley and once more Jefford reverted to his original suspicion of Wid, finally going so far as to state that he would like to have more details.

Wid, seeing that the idea against him had taken some root in other minds, calmly explained:

"It's easy to prove that I didn't kill Quigley, Jefford. These gents know I was carryin' a certain kind o' a gun, an' a blind man could see it wasn't that kind which killed poor Quigley!"

"But who looked through yore saddlebags? You mighta used another gun an' throwed it in the river—or buried it!" Jefford snarled. "It's a damn cinch some-

body salivated pore Jim an' you was the only one there!"

"I didn't drop that pic'ter," Wid said, anger creeping into his tones.

"How does we know you didn't?" Jefford demanded heedlessly. You was there when the pic'ter was drawed! You might 'a' had it! I reckon you was quite a hero with Butterfly Rose. She might have give it to you!"

"You're ridin' the wrong trail, Tobe," Fletcher cut in evenly. "Wid works for me—an' I trust him!"

"I lay my money on the same card!" Murray Wilson snapped. "Fer Gawd's sake, let's talk sense! Wid never salivated Quigley—I know men better'n to think that."

Jefford, though quieted by these votes of confidence, was far from entirely satisfied. Wid saw this and spoke again.

"I ain't tryin' to defend myself against a damn fool idee," he said slowly, "but I'm doin' a little thinkin' on my own hook an' you fellers has said enough, so I'm goin' to say my piece!

"I don't think Miguel Cortez had a dern thing to do with this thing! Neither did the old woman. Butterfly Rose might know a little somethin' about it, but I doubt even that. What I'm thinkin' is this: you gents all took me for a Ranger. On that score somebody tried to salivate me the other night in town. On the same score, somebody killed Jim Quigley 'cause they thought it was me! An' whoever that somebody is, he's the rustler!"

"By Gawd!" Fletcher declared, "that's plain truth! But how did they mistake you?"

"I told 'em at the hotel I was comin' out here. They knew that! Thinkin' I was a Ranger they found out someway that I had gone to the river lookin' fer trails where cattle had been run. They laid out there for me. When Quigley camped the killer spotted him for me an' killed him quick 'thout lookin' too close! At that, he wasn't takin' much chance on missin' me. I was only 'bout a mile away. It was natural fer him to make the mistake."

Jefford raised his brows in wonderment; and because of the way Wid spoke, the others grunted their sudden belief in Wid's theory. To press home his point Wid went on:

"Find the man that shot at me back in town, find the man that knew you was expectin' a Ranger—an' you've found the man that killed Quigley an' the man who has been runnin' off yore cattle!"

"Yes," Murray Wilson agreed audibly, "I reckon you're right enough, Wid. But find him!"

"I'd like right well for you to leave that to me!" Wid announced quietly.

"For the time bein' I'd like to do that, Wid," Fletcher said firmly. "An' I'm willin' to pay five thousan' dollars reward if you do it."

"An' I'll add a thousan' to that!" Jefford declared. "But I'm damned if I'll wait over long while you're huntin'!"

"I got a hunch you won't have to, Jefford!" Wid countered quietly. "Six thousan' bucks looks big to me. When I git it I'll go back to my old game."

"What's that, Wid?" Fletcher asked, "roamin'?"

"Nope!" Wid grinned. "Romeoin'!"

The two riders returned from Quigley's range during the middle of the afternoon. They brought only the information that no cattle had been run. They had searched the river banks, they said, for a trail other than the one Wid had mentioned, but the killer had been too clever. However, confidence in Wid was restored by their report, for they described how they had followed his trail and checked up every statement he had made.

Shortly after that the rider from town returned. It was to him that Wid turned hopefully. Only disappointment came, however. Briefly, Bart had positively proven that Miguel and the old woman had never left the town the night before. As for Butterfly Rose, she had remained within actual sight of Elton himself until nearly dawn. She had done her dances on scheduled time throughout the night, and at the very time the shot that killed Quigley had been fired, she was being announced for the first number.

"Yeah—that's all right," Wid cried impatiently, "but how about the pic'ter? Tell us that!"

"She didn't know nothin' about it, Wid," the messenger lamented. "When Bart asked her for it she went to her dressin' room to git it. A coupla minutes later she returned sayin' that it had been stole."

Jefford, who had awaited word, grunted dismally. Fletcher seemed to grind his teeth in impotence and Murray Wilson tapped a hopeless requiem with his finger tips against a window pane through which he had been gazing. It was the foreman who finally spoke:

"Wid, there ain't a single trail better'n the one that went into the river! I reckon you got a job to do, awright! Followin' blocked trails!"

CHAPTER VI

A Gift of Chance

THE funeral of Jim Quigley was an affair that made a lasting impression upon Wid Samuels. Jefford remained for the solemn event and participated in the burial out under the prairie stars. Mrs. Fletcher sang two hymns as the riders stood about the huge room of the ranch house. Fletcher read a service from the Bible, verses chosen by his tearful wife, and then the body of the rider was borne slowly to its final resting place.

But throughout the simple ceremony Wid was more and more impressed with the feeling of confidence and trust that was generated among the ranch hands. They had faith in Fletcher, faith in each other and a lasting worship of the kindly old lady who looked upon each of them as a personal responsibility.

When the funeral had ended and Jefford had "hit the leather," as he put it, and ridden toward his own ranch, Wid joined the men at the bunkhouse. There was very little said by any of them. It was apparent that they all realized the task which he had undertaken and, while none said so in words, they made it clear that they looked to him to avenge the killing of Quigley . . . a task calling for real manhood!

Fletcher stopped for a few minutes at the door.

"That money stands, Wid," he reiterated. "Five thousan' from me if you pin this rustlin' to the right man's buttonhole! Tobe'll stand by his promise, too—an' all o' us wish you luck!"

"Thanks, Fletcher," Wid said. "I told you I was glad I happened into this, an' I am. I ain't doin' any idle talkin', but I'll hit the trail about dawn to-morrow an' when I come back again I hope to be able to say somethin' def'nite."

Fletcher held forth his hand and they clasped warmly.

"Draw on us, Wid, if necessary. Somehow I got a hunch you're exackly the gent we been needin' out here."

True to his word, Wid saddled while day was breaking and the cook looked up in surprise as he presented himself at the cook-house for a breakfast. In twenty minutes his pony was loping across the plains in the same direction that had been taken the day before.

But the lope ceased as soon as the ranch house dropped from sight behind them. Wid urged the animal to a steady gallop.

"Git goin', hoss," he murmured, "I can't help but wonder how anybody knew just where I went yesterday! It strikes me that somebody at the Lazy M done some talkin'. I hate to say that, hoss, because they're a great bunch back there—but facts is facts.

"O' couse, I might 'a' been trailed; or I might be all wrong in thinkin' that Quigley was killed for me—but I ain't takin' any chances. I never did see anythin' so queer as the way things are happening' out here!"

He followed his own trail, made the day before, until he reached the river. There he put the pony down the steep bank and into the stream. For some little distance they buried their trail in the shifting muck, then Wid put the horse straight at the deeper water and, after a splashing struggle, they emerged on the far side.

Once again they remained so that the animal's hoofs were submerged and after perhaps another mile had thus been covered and they had passed well below the point where Wid had found Jim Quigley, they recrossed the stream and mounted the bank onto Lazy M property once more.

"Now, hoss," Wid said, "that ain't the best trail-buryin' job in the world by no means, but if we're bein' followed it'll hold 'em back a mite, I'm thinkin'. An' we'll

start lookin' where they ain't expectin' us to. We'll just push on down to Jefford's land an' do our trail huntin' from the other end o' the line."

The warm sun quickly dried Wid's clothes and he rode with his boots hooked over the pommel by the spurs. They, too, quickly dried out. By the time hunger began to tell him that the sun was reaching its zenith, Wid had spotted landmarks which told him that he had gained the southern extremity of Jefford's land and could begin to work back up the river in quest of trails.

He planned to go minutely over the ground, missing nothing, overlooking no chance to detect the slightest sign that might tell a story otherwise buried in mystery, and he knew that such a task, properly done, might easily consume three days.

He ate a quick meal and allowed the pony about an hour to rest and cool off. It was during this period that he came to a decision to ride every boundary line of both Jefford's and the Lazy M properties. In that manner, he thought, he must inevitably find the place where cattle had crossed those lines under the urging of rustlers.

"Jefford's was run off las' night," he mused, "so I reckon the best chance I got is to trace the newest trail. I'll ride north to that boundary an' then work back."

Though he kept a rapid pace on his northward journey, he also maintained a sharp lookout for chance trails. Once or twice he spotted bunches of cattle grazing, but at such distances that he was unable to tell whether a rider was with them or not.

The country grew more rugged as he progressed. Barrancas sprang up suddenly before him; low, rolling hills appeared much as though the prairie might have been a vast canvas under which air was billowing.

From the top of one of these mounds he suddenly espied a place where the ground was scarred with the trampling of many hoofs. There were prints of both horses and steers and a more careful investigation showed him heel prints such as a rider's boot would leave.

"A brandin' party," he mused shrewdly. "They musta found a batch o' calves runnin' together. There's been a dozen or so branded here. Funny thing they'd put a runnin' brand on that many when they was so near the ranch!"

He dismounted and walked about the hollow. It was clear that his original deductions were correct, for he found the ashes of a sizeable fire where a branding iron had been heated. He was about to mount again and continue his way north, when something else caught his eye.

The air in the barranca stirred slightly, sagebushes swayed a little and Wid's eye caught the flash of some object which hung suspended from a bush a short distance away. He went to it. Reaching down he drew forth a small patch of blanket. About the cloth there lingered a musty odor.

A strange light appeared in Wid's eyes as his investigations continued. The blanket was damp, and on one side it was seared and brown, as though it might have been afire and someone had plunged it into water. The other side of the cloth told a tale even plainer. To it clung bunches of hair.

"So that's it!" Wid muttered grimly as the force of his thoughts took the shape of words. He stood for some little time looking at the piece of blanket, then he went carefully over the trampled ground of the barranca again. Though he made no sound, his jaw set firmly and it was evident by his actions that he had made more than one discovery that roused him to fever heat.

Finally, he returned to his pony, placed the piece of blanket carefully in his saddlebag, and remounted. Because the ground had been so thoroughly marked up by the branding party, he made no effort to cover his own trail in the place. Instead, he pressed his horse straight ahead so that anyone following him would think that he had ridden unsuspectingly through the barranca. But a few miles farther north he struck into some particularly rough going and thus smothered the trail he had left.

The horse had his own head as they went. Wid was so deeply engrossed in the sudden discoveries he had made that he paid little heed either to the speed at which they traveled or the direction in which they went.

"Runnin' brands is one thing," he muttered finally, "but they ain't put on through no wet blanket! There was at least a dozen brands run back there. Jefford said he lost

twenty head! I got a hunch that the cattle these folks are losin' ain't bein' drove very far—an' that's why they leave no trail!"

As though the words might have created a definite decision in his mind, he pulled his horse sharply about and cut through the rolling grounds in a direction which, he felt, must bring him to Tobe Jefford's ranch. He was not at all sure what his course would be once he arrived there, but he felt instinctively that the thing for him to do was to remain close to the scene of the last night-riding.

Mid-afternoon found him in territory that was spotted with roaming cattle. He had seen no riders yet, and though he kept a close watch he could find no traces of newly branded calves. In looking back he was forced to admit that his suspicions, after all, rested upon an insecure foundation. If the cattle branded back in that secluded barranca were the stolen cattle which Jefford had lost the night before—where was the trail that must have been made when they were driven off Jefford's ranch? There was none leaving the barranca. In fact, it was easy to see where the cattle had run free again over Jefford property. In that case, why the wet blanket?

"I stumbled onto this business by chance," he said to himself as he rode, "an' it may be that I'm makin' a fool o' myself by thinkin' things is queer! But I can't help it! . . . It just don't look right!"

Struck by the lack of calves which he had expected to find, and entirely missing the bawling that is set up by a newly branded animal of tender age, Wid again let his vague suspicions gain ascendancy in his mind. He pulled forth the piece of blanket and examined it carefully. When he folded it and placed it in the saddlebag he had reached a decision, a surprising decision: the hair which still clung to the cloth was not the hair of young calves.

That meant that the running brands which had been applied were now being carried by cattle which had been branded before!

"There's a brand blazer workin'!" Wid snapped in high satisfaction. "Somebody that steams the skin under an old brand off, an' rides a new one over it! That helps a heap, 'specially if they only have to kill the old brand till they can easily sell the beef!"

He spurred his pony toward the nearest bunch of cattle. Though they shied off from him he was easily able to read the brand they carried. First he saw the brand that Tobe Jefford had established as his own. It was an ornate affair, complicated, not easy to describe or to imitate. It traced itself over the hide of the animal as a sort of swastika and at each of the points of the good-luck symbol Jefford had added a crescent which did not join the brand itself.

Again, he saw the simple "Z" brand which, he remembered from Fletcher's range maps, denoted cattle from a ranch originally operated by a man called Zimmerman but later purchased by Jefford after Zimmerman had found the going too hard.

Everything seemed in order, but Wid was not satisfied. There was a good possibility that the brand steaming had been done in order to change a Z brand into the larger one of Jefford's own, but it seemed a weak answer to Wid. He had a hunch, as he put it, that he was at last upon a trail that must lead to some explanation of what Fletcher called "the flying cattle that left no trail."

"I'll be lookin' over this here Jefford outfit in my own way," he decided finally. "When darkness comes I'm goin' to see what they do around this place o' nights!"

Because he had seen no one and recalled from the range maps that Jefford's ranch was but four miles across, he determined to remain where he was and ride into the ranch house under cover of darkness. There was one thing which Wid needed to make his case as complete as it would be astounding. That one thing was to find cattle which had been stolen and prove it by the freshness of the brand which rustlers might have placed over the one originally carried.

Brand blazing, he knew, was not a new art. It was as old, he thought, as brands themselves. And at the simile he smiled, for the words of Miguel Cortez came back to him. It was Miguel's forefather, so the Mexican claimed, who had first brought the brand to the American continent.

"I had a lot o' luck stumblin' onto that barranca," Wid mused after he was settled to await the coming of darkness. "An' if

things works out the way I kinda think they're goin' to, hell is sure goin' to pop around these diggin's!"

CHAPTER VII

A Surprising Romeo

WITH the coming of darkness Wid remounted and started at a fairly brisk pace in the general direction in which he believed the ranch house to be. There was small chance of missing the building, as he was certain to pass within a mile or two of it and must be attracted by the lamps which would be burning.

His principal concern was a fear of being seen. He had perfected a more or less comprehensive plan during the time of waiting and meant to carry that plan through in his own way. Were his presence discovered it was certain to interfere to the point of destroying all that he had gained with the discovery of the blanket which had been used to blaze brands.

So he went carefully. Now and then he disturbed a bunch of cattle but it was too dark for him to see much of them, and he felt sure that no riders were about who would not warn of their presence by a campfire.

In a surprisingly short time he caught sight of the ranch house lights. He rode to within a quarter of a mile of the place, then tethered his pony and went the rest of the way afoot. He felt no little like a thief in the night as he crept forward, but the burning suspicions in his mind would not subside and his determination to see his plan through grew as the hazard increased.

Jefford, he knew, would be frightfully angry at such a performance. As Fletcher had said, he was the second largest rancher in the state and his standing was great. To have his place invaded by a stranger who crept about in the dark might well offer the man grounds for violence which even the law would sanction.

But to attempt to learn what Wid wanted to know in any other manner, would be to court failure from the very start.

From the house came the sound of a voice. It called something about a horse and Wid heard an answer hailed from a greater distance. As he went on a lamp was moved about in one of the rooms. All of these things Wid noticed. He confessed that he was nervous. Suppose that a dog barked, after having discovered his creeping presence? What could he say? What could he do?

But he gained the side of the house and crept toward a lighted window that was ahead of him. The window was open and he felt that the room upon which it gave was empty, for no sound of voices reached him. He found his guesses to be true when he had peered carefully over the sill.

Working more rapidly he circled three sides of the house. Like many others of its kind, the home of Tobe Jefford was long and narrow. The principal entrance was over a porch which covered the length of the house on one side. Wid dared not risk creeping onto the porch, yet he was desperately determined to discover what was being said and done within the place.

He returned to the open window. The room was still empty and the lighted lamp remained on the table where he had first seen it. Gritting his teeth, he decided to take the big chance and gain ingress to the things he wanted.

He slid through the window, crouched low to remain visible from outside the house, and darted for the door of the room which opened onto a semi-dark hallway. When he reached the hall he heard Jefford's voice. The man was talking in heavy tones and Wid gathered the impression that he had been drinking. The manner of his words and a husky, thick quality of voice seemed unmistakable. Suddenly the voice of a woman sounded from a room farther down the hall.

"Tobe!" it called. "Great scott, Tobe, I got to be going! Ain't you ever comin' back here?"

Wid was amazed because he had gathered at the Lazy M that Jefford was not a married man. Also, there was a vaguely familiar note to that feminine voice. Who could it be? Evidently the woman was on very friendly terms with the rancher to address him as she had, by his first name.

"I'm comin' pronto," Jefford called. "I got a damned idjit here that knows more'n

he oughta if he knows one-tenth as much as he thinks he does!"

"I ain't tryin' to argue with you, Tobe," came another male voice. "I was only thinkin' it might be better to use that old east corral—it ain't so near the house an' it ain't as apt to——"

"Shut up!" Jefford snapped harshly. "Don't be tellin' what damn little you do know! Put 'em wherever you please—make it the old east corral—but fer Gawd sake, git 'em there! Don't be runnin' a parade all over the ranch."

"I ain't doin' that! I tell you they'll be fussy fer a day or two, Tobe. I'm only wantin' to keep 'em away——"

"Go on!" Jefford roared. "Hell's fire—who's holdin' you? Ain't I said to put 'em in the old east corral. Put 'em there! Don't stand here talkin' like a parrot!"

Wid heard the sound of footsteps as the man left. He rather felt that working for Tobe Jefford and for Martin Fletcher were as different as day and night! It couldn't be much of a man, he imagined, who would tolerate orders given as Jefford had just given them!

Then he heard the rattle of a bottle against the rim of a glass. His doubts as to Jefford's sobriety seemed well founded. The rancher was pouring himself liquor. Wid imagined him tossing off the potion, then he heard his heavy boots entering the hall and coming toward him. Like a shadow he slipped into the lighted room through which he had gained entrance. It was taking a desperate chance, he thought, but an only one.

If Jefford walked directly past him to the room whence came the feminine voice which had called him, then all might be well. If, on the other hand, he came into the room for the lamp, a thing which he might readily do, Wid would have a lot of hopeless explaining to do!

"Hustle along, Tobe!" the voice called again, "Gee whiz! I can't wait much longer here!"

The heavy footsteps drew nearer the door of the room. Jefford grumbled some response which seemed lost in the very thickness of his voice. But, to Wid's infinite delight, he continued past the door and his steps receded down the hall. Wid waited until he heard the woman greet him, then he daringly slipped out into the hall again and followed the rancher.

He came to a lighted room from which he heard the sound of voices. Again and again the vaguely familiar tone crept into the voice of the woman as she talked. Wid was exasperated that he was unable to identify it. There were few enough feminine voices that he had heard in the locality! Yet this one haunted him, rang on his ears with the familiarity of long acquaintance, yet with the uncertain strangeness that comes with tense nerves and unusual circumstances.

"I got to be going now, Tobe," Wid heard her say again, "it's gettin' late!"

"Tain't, either!" the rancher objected thickly. "You can make it easy in an hour—an' you ain't due fer two! Who's got any right to keep tabs on you as close as all that?"

"But it's better to be careful, Tobe!" she insisted tremulously. "I was never so scared before in my life! . . ."

"Aw—ferget it! You done the right thing, o' course! Leave it to you! You got more sense in a minute than the average man gets in his whole life!"

The girl laughed nervously. "Gee, Tobe!" she muttered uncertainly, but the tone of her voice disclosed to the listening Wid that the tribute had pleased her.

"You have!" the rancher repeated. "Mos' men are damn fools anyhow! They git rattled when things happen fast like that! You didn't! You kept yore head an' done the right thing."

"That's what I'm trying to do now, Tobe," the girl pleaded. "Gee, I'd like to stay here forever, you ought to know that! But I'm thinking of what might happen and it's better I should go right away! They asked so many questions . . . but I just had to come right out and tell you, Tobe . . . I was so scared!"

"Sure—sure thing! You done right that time, too! But don't let 'em scare you like this! What if they did ask questions? Who are they to be meddlin', anyway?"

"Tobe . . . you didn't do it . . . did you?" the girl pleaded.

"Ain't I told you I didn't? Don't ask me that no more!"

Anger had crept into Jefford's voice and Wid heard the girl offer her apology for the question. Then there came a movement from within the room and he heard the rancher kiss her.

"I won't, Tobe, again," the girl promised happily. "Gee . . . I'd die for you Tobe!"

Thoroughly ashamed of the manner in which he was spying upon a love affair, Wid turned to go down the hall, convinced that he would learn nothing of the matter in which he was interested. The familiarity of that voice worried him; he hated to leave without placing it, and he still felt that Jefford offered food for thought, but the only thing that held him there listening was a word which the girl said just as he turned to leave.

"Honest, Tobe," she repeated, "I was scared blue! If Bart Elton had come at me easier I might have told them you had the picture!"

Butterfly Rose! At the discovery Wid gasped so that he feared they might have heard him. It was all clear now, the familiarity of that voice! And how much more was to be deduced from this obvious and quite unsuspected connection between the dancing girl and the rancher? How *much* more?

But Jefford was speaking again. "Well, what if you had? That don't prove nothin'!" he said.

"But it might make people think you did it, Tobe! Suppose I had said that I gave you the picture because we are in love with each other? Then what? When the picture was found, out by that dead man, they would arrest you!"

"They would like hell!" Jefford growled. "I ain't the kind o' gent that gits arrested very easy! But don't be talkin' about that, Rose. You told 'em the thing was stole from your room—leave it at that, see? That leaves 'em a blank trail. An' don't be talkin' about bein' in love with me!"

"But we are in love, aren't we?" she insisted uneasily.

"'Course'n we are," gruffly, "but keep it quiet fer a spell!"

"You're sure you love me, ain't you, Tobe?"

"'Course I am! But it makes me mad when you hike back to that dance place so early. Come on, have a drink with me, Rose, an' we'll fergit that place an' have a good time together!"

"No, no! It would be bound to cause trouble! They would talk about it, Tobe, an' mention that picture again . . ."

"Damn the pic'ter!" Jefford snarled.

"But I'm only thinking of you, Tobe! It would look very bad."

"It might have been stole from me!" Jefford snarled, then, rather weakly, Wid thought, "just as it was."

"But it is better to let sleeping dogs lie, Tobe! I will go back and dance, and tomorrow morning I will ride out again. And Tobe . . . please don't drink any more."

Seeing that they must soon come into the hall, Wid darted back to the room through which he had entered. More than elated at what he had learned, he glided through the room to the window, slipped his leg over the sill and dropped noiselessly to the ground. There was a busy night ahead of him; he had found the trail of the flying cattle.

As he went, he rapidly turned over in his mind what he should do next. He was so excited that at first he had a hard time of it to think clearly. But finally he managed to.

All that remained was to gather his proofs together, then ride with all speed for the Lazy M. He knew just what was happening to the cattle. He would catch Butterfly Rose as she left the ranch, repeat to her that which he knew, and make her ride with him to Martin Fletcher where her story, coupled with the things that Wid was ready to say, would win for him the reward mentioned.

He darted toward his horse, then stopped so short that he nearly fell. Something jammed against his back. It was hard, round, instantly to be recognized as the barrel of a gun. A firm but whispered voice spoke in his ear:

"Go ahead, stranger," it said, "make a move, just wiggle a whisker, an' I'll blow you wide open!"

CHAPTER VIII

Mockery

IT seemed to Wid that he stood thus, with that menacing weapon prodding into his ribs, for hours. In reality it was but a second or two, then the man who had caught him spoke again in the same cautious, whispered tone:

"Stand pat, stranger! Don't dare make a whimper, un'erstand? If anybody comes I'll do the talkin'! Now march fer that hoss o' yours!"

The gun pressed a little closer and Wid, astounded at the turn things had taken, obeyed. Why did not this man set up a hue and cry? Having captured a nocturnal marauder, why did he not sound an alarm?

But it was no time to ask questions which he knew would not be answered, so Wid obeyed. He set off through the night at a moderate pace and the man kept step with him, the gun still fast against Wid's side.

"Don't do no stumblin'," Wid pleaded. "That gun——"

"Shut up!" the fellow snapped. "I'll look after the gun all right—I'm used to 'em!"

"I ain't, not stickin' in my ribs, leastwise——" Wid muttered.

"You shut up!" grated the other, "I ain't talkin' fer fun!"

Then the ranch house door opened and a streak of yellow light swept across the ground. Instantly Wid's captor went into action. His free hand gripped Wid's shoulder and in the same whispered voice he commanded that his captive lie prone upon the ground. Amazed that the man should thus seek to avoid discovery, Wid obeyed.

The darkness of early evening enveloped them completely. Had it been an hour later when the stars were shining and the moon had climbed over the horizon to shed its light, they must have been discovered despite their precautions, for both Jefford and the girl appeared on the porch and a man brought the girl's horse.

"Good night, Rose, gal," Jefford muttered thickly. "Be a good gal an' git out here early to-morrow, 'cause I'll be waitin' fer you!"

"Good night, Tobe," the girl responded. Wid saw the rancher help her into the saddle; saw her lean over to kiss him.

"Take the short cut, gal," the rancher admonished. "You got plenty time!"

Then, amidst a clatter of hoofs and a rising dust, Butterfly Rose sped into the night and Wid, gazing after her, moaned lugubriously. With her went his plans for the night's work! At the sound he made there came a suggestive prod of the gun and he silenced. Jefford remarked something to the man who had brought Rose's mount, then turned and entered the house.

In the ensuing darkness the gun urged action again. Wid rose and resumed his journey toward the place where he had left his pony. The strange captor said not a word as they walked. When they had reached the horse Wid saw that the stranger, too, had a pony, and had left him with Wid's own.

"We can't be heard out here, boss," Wid whispered with false humility, "an' damned if I ain't sick o' dancin' on the end o' that gun! You're plumb mysterious about things!"

"If I am, I got my reasons," the other growled. "What they are you won't know till the shoe's on the other foot! I mean business, don't forget that! If you ever see the day when you got the drop on me—I might talk. Not before! Me, havin' the drop on you right now, I'm goin' to hear you talk a heap!"

"Yeah?"

"Git on that hoss!" the other snapped. "You'll talk afore I'm through with you!"

"I just as soon talk," Wid assured him. "What about?"

But the stranger avoided the trap.

"I'll ask the questions, you! Git on that hoss an' don't be damn fool enough to try any tricks!"

Wid had already decided not to try any tricks. There was a confident tone and manner about this mysterious captor which spoke for itself. He was not the kind of a man who would run a bluff, or who talked without something to talk about. Of that Wid was certain.

He swung into the saddle and waited as the other man did likewise.

"I been followin' you all day," his captor said then, "so I know you got the lay o' the land! Ride easy an' keep straight. I swear to Gawd I'll plug you if you don't!"

"Where to?" Wid snapped, angered at the complete collapse of his plans due to the sudden interference of this man.

"Straight fer the river," the man ordered.

"Oh, ho!" Wid grunted. "I reckon you must be the greaser curse, huh? Just got to workin', did you?"

"Ride!" the other commanded evenly.

They started, and as they did so, Wid's last hope of a sudden break for freedom went aglimmer. The moon rose and the plains were bathed in a light that was almost as day. Behind him came the soft laugh of the man who held him captive. Neither spoke but both understood. They rode for fully ten minutes. Visions of the fading Butterfly Rose kept recurring to Wid's mind.

He knew that he could never catch her now. She would ride with all the speed her pony had in order not to be late for her dance at Bart Elton's. But even that need not necessarily have ruined his plans; neither the girl nor Jefford knew that Wid had learned so much of them. The next morning would do just as well—except for the man who rode at his back, gun in hand, eyes cold and determined.

"You're meddlin' in somethin' that you don't know much about, mister!" Wid said ultimately. "It's a big deal you've butted in on—an' a dangerous one, take it from me!"

"I don't scare very easy," the man laughed. "Just keep moochin'!"

"Who the hell are you?" Wid demanded. "You ain't a friend o' Jefford's, I'll swear to that from the way you acted back there!"

"Some folks ain't got a friend on earth!" the fellow said. "Mebbe I'm one o' them!"

Wid grated his teeth in impotent rage. It was maddening to have this ridiculous stranger step in just as fate had put him upon the trail of that which Fletcher sought!

Presently the man called a halt.

"Just drop off your hoss, hombre," he commanded. "Stand right still while I'm lookin' at you, an' drop that gun you got at your feet!"

There was nothing for Wid to do but obey. He was helpless in the bright moonlight, and the other with his gun already out and trained. Wid could see in the man's eyes that he would press the trigger at the slightest false move his captive might make.

"It's your turn to howl," he said. "I only hope you make it short!"

"I just as soon come to the point!" the other returned promptly. "I wanna know what you're doin' sneakin' through that house like a burglar! I wanna know what you are doin' ridin' all over hell's half-acre an' buryin' your trail as you go? In addition to that, I wanna know who you are an' what you are—an' as long as I'm holdin' this gun you're goin' to tell me!"

Wid just as firmly decided that he was not going to tell the man all he had asked. As for some of the questions, he was quite willing to answer, however, and these he used to stall for time in a matching of wits with this cool stranger.

"I'll answer," he nodded. "I ain't got nothin' to hide."

"Shoot." The man was still toying with the gun as he held Wid covered. "I'm all ears!"

"My name is Wid Samuels an' I'm a cowpuncher—work for Martin Fletcher who owns the Lazy M outfit."

He paused there, as though expecting some comment from the man, or possibly the interjection of a question. But he waited in stony silence. Wid found it increasingly had to talk to him.

"The reason I been ridin' the way I have is 'cause I been tryin' to pick up some trail o' cattle that has been run off——" he began again. This time the stranger spoke sharply.

"Was you thinkin' they drove these cattle through Jefford's parlor?" he sneered.

"Nope. I found a few things to-day that made me go to Jefford's. I wanted to learn a coupla things from him," Wid said.

"Things he wouldn't tell you, huh?"

"No—not exactly." Wid was thinking like lightning, groping for some loophole through which he might squirm away from

the insistent questions which the man fired like pistol-shots. "First off I was goin' to call on Tobe outright," he hazarded, "but when I got to the ranch I found that gal was there an' that changed everything."

It appeared that Wid had struck upon a happy thought. The man grunted in disdain and jumped at the obvious conclusion:

"Is she your gal? That is—did you think she was, till now?"

The question put Wid in possession of a line of defense which he welcomed avidly.

"Well—" he admitted with what seemed to be reluctance "—I knows her!"

"Same old story! But folks don't ride the way you did just to check up on a gal——"

"Look here," Wid snapped with asperity, "I don't know you from a ton o' coal! I ain't so damned sure what you was doin' snoopin' around that house to-night! Why did you hide from Jefford? What was your idee in trailin' me all day? Who the devil are you? What are you after? I'd like to have them things answered!"

"Mebbe you would, stranger," the man grinned casually, "but, seein' as the gun is in my hand, you won't git 'em answered!"

"Dead-game fightin' man, ain't you?" Wid sneered.

"That's the last thing I want—a fight! It's the one thing I don't do till I'm plumb forced."

"You're willin' enough to snap a gun onto gents what is helpless," Wid growled. The fellow took the taunt without flinching. In fact, it was as though he had not heard it. He went directly back to the questions he had asked.

"You're one o' the Lazy M riders, eh?" he queried.

"I am."

"I noticed your hoss carried a strange brand to this country, stranger." The man said the words quietly, yet there was a world of accusation in them. Wid felt that any explanation he might offer would be accepted with a grain of salt. However, he told the truth.

When he had finished the other fellow observed, "Then you're plumb new here, huh?"

"I am."

"An' Fletcher sent you out all alone lookin' fer trails? He took you on sight an' at your word, eh?"

"He knows men a heap better'n you do!" Wid rasped out. The man grinned appreciatively.

"You can't allus sometimes tell! Did you find what you went after at Jefford's?"

Before Wid realized that he was admitting a whole lot, he had gloatingly snapped forth the answer to the sudden question.

"I sure did! An' if that bothers you I'm tickled plenty!"

"It don't bother me none, stranger! Only it means a heap if you're tellin' the truth. This mornin' I picked you up huntin' trails, accordin' to your own yarn. Now you tell me you found what you went after—that must be the cattle rustlers! Lemme have the story!" There was a deadly logic in the man's words. Wid found it inescapable.

"I won't say a damn word more!" he growled.

"You'll talk or taste lead!" the man promised solemnly.

"I won't talk! Not another word. You'll find that killin' me off will make a rough bed for you to lay in afore you're done with the job!"

"I'm goin' to count ten, stranger," the other said evenly. "If you ain't started talkin' at ten, I'll blow your ear off. Then I'll start over again, an' I'll keep on countin' an' blowin' till you git damned sick o' it an' talk!"

He began a dirge-like count and Wid watched his eyes closely.

"For all I know you're one o' the damned gang!" Wid grated.

The only response was the number three and the steady glare of his captor's gray eyes.

"You prob'ly helped kill poor Jim Quigley las' night!" Wid shot at him, "an' another one on your list won't bother none!" For an answer came the number seven.

"Blow an' be damned to you!" Wid sat absolutely tense as "nine" and then the fatal "ten" were tolled. But the fellow did not shoot. Instead he rose to his feet saying:

"You're a good, game feller—hit the leather an' you an' me'll ride over to Fletch-

er's—we'll see how much you're on the level!"

Inasmuch as the man prevented Wid from doing anything else, he figured that here was the best chance he had of making a quick strike at the heart of the men he suspected. He readily assented to the ride to Fletcher's. There he could quickly establish himself and, at the same time, learn something of the man who had so completely baffled him.

"All I ask is that you ride fast, stranger," he cried in assent. "The quicker I see Martin Fletcher the quicker I'll get to doin' some things that need a heap o' doin'!"

The man gathered up Wid's gun and swung silently into his own saddle.

"I got a fast-runnin' hoss an' a long shootin' gun," he said. Don't think I won't drill you if you start any tricks! I tried to bluff you a minute ago—this time I'll shoot!"

"I believe you," Wid assured him. "Better'n that! I give you my word o' honor I won't try to make a break an' all I ask is that you let that fast runnin' burro o' yours try to keep alongside o' mine!"

"Git goin'," was all the man answered, but almost as though the words had served as a spur to the two horses, they streaked across the plains. Both animals were well rested and each seemed to catch the spirit of a race. For the first few miles the men had difficulty trying to keep the ponies in check, then they settled into a grinding pace that made the earth flash under their flying hoofs. Wid saw that his own horse kept a side eye on the other and that neither would permit the other to forge ahead.

The man, though he kept a sharp watch of Wid, did not speak during the entire ride. The ponies maintained their killing pace until the first light of the Lazy M appeared in the far distance. At sight of it Wid emitted a cry of relief.

"You'll dern soon know just how big a game you busted up, stranger!" he called. But the man did not answer. He merely urged his horse along in order to keep pace.

Very soon they dashed up to the familiar porch and Wid saw that Fletcher, having heard their thundering arrival, was coming toward the door strapping on his gun belt as he walked.

"It's Wid Samuels, Fletcher!" he called. "I got a heavy-thinkin' gent with a heavier gun on his hip alongside o' me!"

Murray Wilson came running from the direction of the bunkhouse. He called a querry that Wid answered with a sharp order.

"Break out the boys, Murray!" he called. "Have 'em throw leather an' pack iron! I reckon we'll be ridin' pronto!" The foreman, sensing that Wid was in a hurry and acting on some new development he had uncovered, whirled in his tracks and ran back toward where the men were waiting.

"Come inside, Wid," Fletcher said. "I reckon you've run onto somethin'!"

Wid paused only long enough to take the burnt blanket from his saddlebag, then he walked across the porch, the silent stranger still at his side, though his air of watchfulness was noticeably less strenuous.

When they had gained the room Wid turned toward the stranger.

"I reckon if I was to interduce you to Martin Fletcher I'd say things you wouldn't like to hear, stranger! All I can tell the boss is what happened. I'll make that right pronto, too! This here gent, Fletcher——" but the stranger interrupted in the same calm voice he had used throughout his experience with Wid.

"You're Martin Fletcher?" he asked, "owner o' the Lazy M?"

"I'm that same, friend," Martin said a little stiffly.

"This gent works fer you? He's all right?"

"Absolutely!"

"Good," the stranger grinned then. "I'll be tellin' you that my name's Rogers." He flipped back the side of the buckskin vest he wore and a badge twinkled in the lamplight. "I'm a Ranger!"

"Well—well——" Wid was actually gasping for words. The mockery of his great chance being lost because of the very forces he was trying to aid, left him speechless. After a moment more of stammering, he finished the sentence: "—— why in hell didn't you say so!"

CHAPTER IX

The Old East Corral

FLETCHER, by exerting his kindly influence, prevented some hot words between Wid and the newly discovered Ranger.

"Do you think I'm comin' in here secret an' then tell the first burglar I meet who I am?" the Ranger demanded.

"If you got brains enough to be a Ranger," Wid growled, "I should oughta be President! The very gal that can solve most o' this trouble, you let ride away from us!"

It was at that point that Fletcher adjusted matters by inserting his own personality.

"Don't fight over it, boys," he counseled, "you was both doin' the best you knew how an' luck was agin' you. The important thing is for us to tell Rogers all that has happened up to last night an' then for you, Wid, to tell us what happened to-night. Then everybody'll have the story complete an' know what they're doin'."

Because each of them spoke directly to the point they were soon down to the few preceding hours in the narration of events.

"Lemme butt in a second there," Rogers said. "It was right there I come along the river. We usually try to keep folks from knowin' who we are and what we are doin', see? I saw Wid, here, tryin' to bury his trail an' figgered I was playin' in luck fer fair! I followed him—now let him tell the rest."

Wid finished rapidly. He showed them the blanket, told them of the branding party that had taken place in the barranca on the northern extremity of Jefford's ranch, then related what he had overheard between Jefford and the girl.

"An' here's what I figger to do, Fletcher," he said after finishing the story, "I want the boys to be ready to ride down to Jefford's as soon as we can start. Murray is gittin' 'em fixed up now. We'll take a look-see in that old east corral that Jefford was talkin' so much about. I know what we'll find there, too!

"This blanket taught me a heap. In the first place, it made me see that somebody was blazin' out brands. That meant that the cattle you been losin' wasn't drove off at all! They been run over onto Tobe Jefford's ranch an' rebranded!"

Fletcher leaped to his feet, his eyes afire. Someone had once told Wid that the worst man in the world to have trouble with should be the one hardest to rouse to anger. He saw the truth of that, now. Fletcher had gone white; the genial set of his chin had become transformed into a thing of concrete firmness; his eyes seemed to spit a fire that glinted in the light of the oil lamp.

"I'll be takin' a look over Tobe's ranch," he grated, and started for the door.

"Hold up a minute, Fletcher!" Wid called sharply. "Lemme finish my story. I told you in the first place to find the gent who knew you was expectin' a Ranger, an' you'd have the gent that tried to salivate me in town. Again, the same gent killed Jim Quigley thinkin' he was me! He done it 'cause he took me for Rogers here!

"When I found that pic'ter I was stumped. But that explained itself plenty when I seen Butterfly Rose havin' a love affair with Tobe Jefford! Everythin' tied in pretty, see? Now just half a minute more an' I'll go with you to look in that old east corral. What I'm goin' to say may not make you real proud o' yourself, but I can't help that! It's the plain truth. The brand you got is a joke! It's at the bottom o' all your trouble——"

"The Lazy M, you mean? I don't git you, Wid," the rancher interrupted somewhat sharply.

"You will in a minute!" imperturbably. "The 'M' is 'Lazy' because the brand is put on with the letter layin' on it's side. Look here!"

By way of illustrating his point, Wid seized a paper and drew the brand that Fletcher used, a letter M resting on its side rather than placed upon the hide in its normal position. The others gathered around looking over his shoulder.

"An' now look here," Wid continued. Then he turned his pencil around and erased the middle part of the letter leaving only two bars, one above the other. While they watched he smilingly drew a diagonal bar connecting the two remaining marks and the

result was, of course, a plain letter "Z." Fletcher caught the point at once.

"That's Zimmerman's old brand!" he snapped.

"Sure," Wid said, "an' now I want to know what's become o' this gent Zimmerman?"

"He sold out to Tobe, so they said," Fletcher grated, "an' when the deal was done he went to work fer him as foreman! I'm beginnin' to see a hell o' a lot now!"

"But you ain't seen it all yet, Fletcher!" Wid continued. "Runnin' a brand is a tricky thing to do! It takes an artist, in a way. Know what I mean? Stop an' think a minute. What's Jefford's own brand?"

"You must have seen it, Wid," Fletcher offered a little helplessly. "It's got crescents and stripes . . . an' what not!"

"It's crescents set off'n a swastiki," Rogers said. "I made it my business to see those things just like Wid here."

"Righto!" Wid snapped. "An' lemme ask you this: Who ever designed that brand? What was it designed for? If you ask me it took an artist to draw it an' that artist had to know a heap about brandin' besides!

"But, once he had that brand fixed he could blot out almost any other brand on a steer! There's so many lines in Tobe's brand that it's a blotter, once you git it run onto a hide! But the lines are far enough apart so the brand don't make a sore an' blur out! He had you comin' an' goin', Fletcher!"

"Then he didn't lose no cattle las' night?"

"No! That was all a stall. He thought I was the Ranger an' he killed Jim Quigley thinkin' it was me. Then he come over here to start word that rustlers had been ridin' again an' to throw the blame their way. When he got here he found his mistake and did his best to bluff it through!"

"We'll be lookin' at that corral, Wid," Fletcher repeated impatiently.

"Half a minute is all I want this time," Wid urged in restraining the man once more. "There's just one thing more. We rather git Jefford fer the killin' o' Quigley than just fer the rustlin'. We want him hung high an' proper if he's guilty! The only way to do that is to scare Butterfly Rose into tellin' all she knows!"

"You're right, Wid," Rogers agreed. "I reckon, me bein' the stranger in town, I better do that. I'm an officer an' I got a right to do lots o' things you gents couldn't."

"I was goin' to ask you to, Rogers," Wid approved. "Ride to town an' see the gal alone. I wouldn't even trust Bart Elton before I talked with her! Keep everybody away from her——"

"You gents may run into trouble over at Jefford's," the Ranger interrupted, "it's best I swear you in as deputies to me. Then, whether you find anythin' or not, wait there till I come out. I won't be over-long."

So it was agreed and within ten minutes Rogers was riding toward the town to get all that Butterfly Rose could tell, and a cavalcade of stern-visaged men was driving hard across the plains in the direction of Tobe Jefford's ranch. That peculiar tensity which grips men as they face impending dangers cast a spell of silence over the riders.

Wid, Fletcher and Murray Wilson rode in the van. Wid was speaking his final instructions as the lights of the Jefford ranch house appeared.

"There ain't no sense in doin' any sneakin' around, boys," he suggested. "Why ain't it best to ride to that corral an' see what's in it? You know where it lays, don't you Murray?"

"Sure. It's about a mile east o' the house. Gawd, I can't hardly believe this here!"

"You're right, Wid. We'll ride in an look. If anybody tries to stop us we'll tell 'em who we are——"

"An' look anyway!" Wid laughed queerly.

They clattered directly past the house like a troop of cavalry passing through a besieged town in war time. Jefford, obviously astounded at the sudden appearance of so many riders, staggered onto the porch. He called out to them in husky tones and Wid could see that the man had not followed the advice of Butterfly Rose on the question of drinking. He had become beastly drunk.

The night riders fell upon the east corral with the swoop of some predatory bird of prehistoric times. The moon still shone clearly and it was seen that some twenty or thirty head were imprisoned behind the

bars. There came a shout to halt which the men disregarded. Then there came a warning cry and the quick roar of a shot split the night.

The corral was ideally hidden away in a sweeping coulee that served to isolate it from the rest of the ranch. The reverberations of the shot rattled through the gully and mingled with them came the sharp curse of a man who had felt the bite of lead.

"This here is Martin Fletcher's o' the Lazy M!" the rancher bellowed, by the way of explanation to the man who had fired. The announcement brought several muttered curses, then another shot. It was evident that the corral was guarded by a party of the riders who trailed with Jefford.

"That's enough fer me, by Gawd!" Fletcher grated. "Walk in an' look over them cattle, lads!"

The words served as a declaration of war. Shots came now with a staccato frequency that made of the calm night a battlefield. Men grunted, groaned, cursed. Horses reared, whinnied in pain or terror. Stirrups rattled as they swung clear and sharp commands rose above the pandemonium of fighting.

The Lazy M riders had not hesitated to answer the firing, once Fletcher's orders had been couched so definitely. Here was the hour when they might vent the cumulative emotions which had been goading them for months. Though they were not possessed of all the details, they knew that Jefford had been caught as the rustler who had "taught cows to fly." Indubitably they connected him with the murder of Jim Quigley, and the voice of their shots was the voice of their righteous vengeance.

The defenders of the corral, though fewer in number than the attackers, were blessed with the tremendous advantage of fortification. They lay in the shadows cast by the corral bars and it was necessary for the attackers to fire at random or await the flash of a weapon for guidance.

Inside the corral the frightened cattle set up a bellowing that lent its raucuous volume to the already blatant voice of the fight and confusion. Horns clanked together and steer after steer, goaded to a frenzy, lunged against the bars until they creaked under the weight of plunging bodies and goring horns.

This had the effect of driving some of the defenders from their stronghold. The men could choose between fighting in the open or being trampled upon by stampeding steers.

"Stay with this bunch, Murray!" Fletcher managed to bellow above the din. "See what's in that corral an' when you drive off this gang leave men here to keep what they find fer ev'dence! I'll be takin' a look to Tobe Jefford!"

Wid, sensing that Fletcher had reached that point of anger where berserk controls, swung his own pony and dashed after the man as he rode toward the ranch house. He drew alongside while yet there was a hundred yard stretch still to be traveled.

Lamps were moving about within the house. Through a window they caught a fleeting glimpse of Jefford, lamp in hand, talking angrily with some unseen figure. At the porch they slid from their saddles and Wid laid a restraining arm on Fletcher's shoulder.

"Easy, Fletcher," he warned. "I reckon you better cool off a little! Don't walk in there just fer to be shot up! Better leave me do the first part!"

Before the rancher could protest Wid had slipped through the door and was in the hall. What he saw brought a delighted smile to his lips, yet sent his gun into action with the speed of a serpent's head. The shot roared through the hall. A wild scream rent the air and there came the lasting ring of metal that has been snapped in two. Like a chord of faint, rare music, it sounded, but it outlasted the more resonant sound of the shot and the quavering crescendo of the scream.

"Hold that lamp steady!" Wid commanded. Then he walked down the hall and the rancher, gun in hand, followed.

Tobe Jefford, his eyes dulled by the fumes of the liquor he had drunk, one hand still holding the careening lamp, stood leaning against the wall. It was clear that his mind was not functioning with clarity. His features seemed bloated, his lids half closed, his lips sagging.

Across the hall from him, cringing back

against the wall, his black eyes spitting a fire that was as venomous as the baleful glare of the jaguar, was Miguel Cortez. His slender body seemed to be recoiling, his left hand gripped his right wrist and Wid could see that the fingers of the right hand still held the hilt of the knife his own shot had carried away as it hung poised over Jefford's head.

"Another o' your pretty knives gone to hell, eh, Miguel?" Wid sneered. "I'm right glad to find you here, Mex! You was the only one I couldn't figger in on this deal! Now we'll fix that!"

"Damn! Damn!" the Mexican grated impotently. His perfect English again lost to him, his words slurred with the Latin twist that was his nature in the volume he began to pour forth.

"See," Jefford mumbled thickly. "I tol' you you couldn't git away with it, Cortez! This here's the Ranger gent . . . he's come fer us all! Ain't you the Ranger?" to Wid.

"I sure am," Wid acknowledged.

"Liar!" Cortez snarled. "You geeve beeg fine word bifore! You lie—you not Ranger!"

"I was swore in a coupla hours ago!" Wid smiled evenly. "So was Fletcher, an' a heap o' others! We've come fer you—just as Jefford says."

Before anyone could answer Jefford's body began to sag against the wall. The lamp he held tipped perilously, his free hand fluttered upward toward his reeling head.

"He—he—" pointing at Miguel Cortez "—the damned greaser—he—poisoned—me! He knew I—killed Quigley—an' he—wanted—money!"

Fletcher had seized the lamp as Jefford was speaking. Cortez screamed maledictions upon them all but remained helpless under the menace of Wid's gun. Fletcher helped the confessed killer of Jim Quigley into the room near at hand and eased him into a chair. Wid saw that Cortez followed and the lamp was placed upon the table.

"Lemme—talk!" Jefford was pleading, "it's the only—chance I got—to git even with that snake!"

At that point Murray Wilson appeared at the door. There was a sardonic smile about his lips.

"You win, Wid," he said, "that old east corral is filled with steers that has got newly burnt brands on 'em. You was right about that blanket——"

"Wait!" Jefford stammered, his eyes fast glazing. "I ain't got much time!—I'm the rustler—me an' Zimmerman schemed it all out—we been changin' your—Lazy M to a—Z, Martin! We had this Mex—draw up that—blotter brand o' ours—an' he was the one—used the runnin' iron—an' the blanket. He could blot out a brand so it lasted till we sold an' slaughtered the beef. He—got me to kill—Quigley thinkin' it was—you!" his hand endeavored to point at Wid, but only his eyes conveyed the message.

Coming as it did, in jerky, gasping staccato utterances, the confession was the most damning thing Wid had ever heard. And, peculiar it seemed to him afterward, none of the men present seemed to feel resentment against Jefford as keenly as they did against the cringing Mexican who, they knew, had conceived the plot out of his ability to sketch designs and his hereditary knowledge of brands.

"I done fer—Quigley," Jefford stammered along, his eyes virtually closed, now. "I admit it—I thought he was—this gent!"

"You're just drunk, Tobe," Fletcher snapped, "you ain't poisoned!"

A ghost of a smile crossed Jefford's lips. He held up his right hand and disclosed a slight cut across the palm.

"Don't—tell *me!*" he groaned. "Look at that devil's knife——"

Miguel, at the words, seemed to realize that he was trapped. With the frenzied courage of the cornered rat, he made a wild lunge toward the door. Fletcher's mighty fist lashed forth—there was no science in the blow, no particular direction except that it was intended to stop the Mexican. Which it did.

By chance the fist fell exactly upon the man's neck and, without a sound other than that of the fall, Miguel Cortez collapsed, face downward. In a trice Murray Wilson was on his back holding him and Wid had slipped into the hall and found the knife blade.

Before Miguel Cortez had regained con-

sciousness, Tobe Jefford had departed this life and, somehow, the white men there were glad of it.

CHAPTER X

Fletcher Deals

ROGERS returned from town with Butterfly Rose. In almost stoical silence he heard from Fletcher what had happened at the Jefford ranch. Then, immediately, he put the stamp of approval on that affair and went to Jefford's desk.

Very shortly he returned and handed to Fletcher several slips of paper.

"Start a rider in all four directions an' see that one o' these posters is hung up, Fletcher," he said. "Git 'em goin' pronto!"

Wid glanced at the poster and saw that it was notification that the State had taken over the property under the law and that all persons were warned that such was the case and ordered to present any claims against the property to the State Capital.

Butterfly Rose, much to Wid's surprise, greeted the death of Jefford tearfully but philosophically. She had told Rogers all that she knew, which was very little except that she had given Jefford the sketch of herself and lied to Elton when the man had questioned her. However, events had set at rest any further need of the girl or her testimony.

Zimmerman had disappeared and one of the men of Jefford's place who had been wounded and thus captured, said that he had fled almost as soon as Fletcher had shouted his identity out at the old east corral.

The cattle which obviously belonged to Fletcher were promptly returned to him. Cortez maintained a silence that was in no wise helpful to him. Within a week of the time the State had taken over the property they had appraisers there and the entire ranch was placed on the block for sale.

While this was being done border law was showing a speed of action that was commendable. Miguel Cortez was tried; his knife blade offered in evidence and the confession of Jefford related. He was promptly convicted and hanged. Just before the deed was done he broke down and confessed his part of the affair. The old Mexican woman wept bitterly at his death, then, apparently seeing that nothing was thus to be gained, returned to her work at Bart Elton's and seemed once more to slip into the routine of her life.

Elton was heard to say once that the woman was an old slave of the Cortez family and after the first bitterness of the death of Miguel had passed, she had found a freedom and happiness never known to her during his life.

During that week Wid had begun to show signs of uneasiness that were not lost to Martin Fletcher. Once he went so far as to mention the matter of the reward to the rancher.

"Anxious to git back to Romeoin', Wid?" the rancher bantered.

"Yep," honestly, "I reckon with five thousan' bucks to git started on, I might have a chance to talk to that gal, Fletcher!"

"She didn't turn you down 'cause you was poor, did she?"

"Nope. Turned me down 'cause she said I could easy enough be rich but I wouldn't try!" Wid stated.

"I reckon she mighta been right, too! You're a great feller, Wid, but you gotta have somebody git you started!" Fletcher said.

"Five thousan' dollars might do that thing, Fletcher!" Wid grinned.

"You should 'a' caught a diff'rent rustler, Wid, then it would 'a' been six thousan'!" Fletcher laughed. "You'd got Tobe's bluff reward then."

"I'd be plumb satisfied with the five, Fletcher!" suggestively.

"You'll get it, Wid. I just wanna wait till I see what happens over at Tobe's place. It won't be long."

And as it developed, the rancher was correct. Inside three weeks of the time that Jefford's schemes collapsed, the State requested bids for the property. There were few in that portion of the country who could begin to handle a transaction as large as the one the State desired and it fell naturally to Fletcher to make the bid.

He bought in the land, houses, and cattle at a ridiculously low figure. For several days before the transaction was completed Wid thought that he sensed something un-

usual in the air about the Lazy M. He attributed it to the bustle of annexing the Jefford place but even that failed to explain it entirely. Finally Fletcher called him into the office and they seated themselves for a talk.

"Well, I own Jefford's old place now, Wid," the rancher began. "That's a fine property, too!"

"You bet it is, Fletcher," Wid agreed promptly. "I'm right glad to see you git it! Fine water, good grazin'—smooth country—everythin'!"

"How'd you like to run it fer me, Wid?"

"Foreman? Me?"

"No—part owner! Why not take a half interest there instead o' the five-thousan'-dollar reward?"

The proposal was so surprising and so altogether inviting that Wid was speechless. He rose, paced the room a moment, then found words.

"That's damn fine o' you, Fletcher!" he said. "But you an' me both know that five thousan' ain't enough to buy a fifth o' that place!"

"I said you'd have to run it, too! That's the big thing!"

"I can't do it, Fletcher. You won't unner'stand—but I can't. It ain't only that you're givin' me too much—you see it's—somethin' else——"

"It's that gal, Wid, ain't it?" Fletcher grunted.

"Yeah! Derned if she ain't a peach!"

"Couldn't you go git her an' bring 'er back?"

"I dunno—I'll try. I'd sure love to grab that thing you offer me—but I can't say fer sure. Mebbe she won't come!"

"Well," Fletcher grunted, "I'll go into town this mornin' an' git your five thousan', Wid. In the meantime ride over to the new ranch an' git those black record books that Tobe kept, will you? There's a coupla things I want to see there an' ask your idees on—then I'll slip you the reward an' you kin hike arter this peach that's worryin' you such a heap!"

Wid grinningly shook the rancher's hand and assured him that he would be back with the books as soon as Fletcher was back from town.

But he was not. Murray Wilson was over at the new place also and he managed, what with a million silly questions, to delay Wid's return. Fletcher was waiting when he got back.

"I got the money, Wid," the rancher said, "an' I also started 'em workin' on them deeds an' searches on the new ranch. It won't take long 'cause the State just got through deedin' to me. By the time you git that gal an' come back here, I reckon we'll have things set. Don't lose your money while you're gone!"

"I wish I felt as sure I was comin' back as you do!" Wid assured him. "If you saw the gal you'd know how easy she could turn a gink like me down!"

"Mrs. Fletcher wants to say g'by to you. She's got the money fer you." Fletcher motioned him toward the ranch house living room.

And as Wid crossed the threshold he heard a merry laugh and stood aghast. For the very girl of whom he had been talking was standing there awaiting him. He stood as though paralyzed.

"See, Wid," she laughed delightedly, "why—I've even chased you clear down here! I certainly won't lose you if I can help it!"

"You—you—told me——" Wid stammered.

"I told you that you were lazy, and easy-going! And you were! You needed something to stir you out of a foreman's rut and I told you I wouldn't marry you till you found it—but I would have if you hadn't been fool enough to run away without a word to anyone. I almost died, until I traced you here and—and followed you!"

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him while Mrs. Fletcher beemed happy approval.

"Aren't you glad to see me, Wid?" the girl asked excitedly. "Can't you say anything at all?"

Wid grinned, hugged her in a bearlike embrace, then called out to Mrs. Fletcher:

"Please hand your husban' that five thousan', will you, ma'am? Tell him it's my share o' the Jefford place—an' we're partners!"

THE "OBJECTION" LESSON

By Clee Woods

Stub an' Scoops an' Hutch decide to give a tenderfoot a little lesson in cow-country manners. But maybe them three punchers didn't learn somethin' theirselves!

"BY all the horned gallinipers and snaky cows, come here an' look at this cook shanty!"

Old Hutch Bowman's wrathful voice resounded through "Hutch's Hut" the moment he set foot inside the kitchen to start a belated breakfast.

"My gosh amighty, Hutch, yuh sound as mad as a big maverick bull when he's necked down," commented "Stub" Barnes with interest. "What's rimmed in on us now?"

"Jist come here an' take a look! Every dish on the place as dirty as a scurvy hog—the pot and pans too. Look at that flour an' gravy spilt on the floor an' the can of cow lick upset on the table. Who in the hell's camped here while we was gone?"

Stub came to the kitchen door in mild wonderment. A single glance inside, however, threw him into an equally violent fit of anger.

"What in the all-fired damnation!" he ejaculated, pushing his undersized body past Hutch and into the kitchen. "Looks like a stinkin' bunch of goatherders had lived here about six months. Scoops, come here."

"Scoops" Foster, the third member of the trio that had long occupied the distant post of the big Two O outfit, came clinking from the corral. The three had just got back to camp after a long ride in the late hours of the night. They had stayed late in town the past night, participating in a sort of preliminary celebration to the more important events that were to attend the

wedding of Grace Anderson, daughter of the Two O boss.

"What's eatin' on you fellers?" inquired the lengthy Scoops, coming up. "Hutch, your old saddlehorn nose is red as a brandin' iron and your eyes are squintin' fire almost. And Stub's prancin' around there like the spiffiest colt that ever— what the blazin' bobcats!"

"Take another squint fer yerself," the elderly Hutch told him. "Some lowdown Apache or Mex has played like we was pigs and he was settin' up housekeepin' fer us."

"Say, it's been that dude we met back there in the Double K Pass," Scoops declared forthwith. "He's stayed here last night."

"Then by the livin' hellbrands," avowed Hutch, "we'll go ketch 'im an' learn 'im some first-hand edification about how to act in a cowpuncher's camp, when it's left wide open, hospital-like, fer all comers. Git to yer hosses, boys, an' see that yuh've got yer six-guns, too."

The indignant cowpunchers threw their saddles onto fresh mounts and went galloping off in pursuit of the offender. They knew he could not have more than a forty-five minute start of them, and by cutting through on a trail too rough for ordinary use they could reduce that lead considerably. In something more than an hour they espied a solitary horseman ahead. The pleasant-faced young rider seemed to be waiting for them at the forks of the trail.

"Good thing we've caught 'im in time to git back and have some chuck and then dress in time to make it to the weddin' by three," said Stub with relief in his voice.

"That's right too," agreed Scoops. "I wouldn't be late for Miss Grace's weddin' if this bird went back and dragged the whole hut through a mess of old sheep dip. Only I'm plumb sorry she ain't marryin' a cattleman of some kind. But mebbe it will come in handy sometimes for the boss to have a bank cashier's son in the family."

The waiting horseman showed signs of friendliness as the Two O punchers galloped up.

"Can you gentlemen tell me which trail will get me to the county seat the quickest?" asked the young man.

"Jist a minute," was Hutch's answer. "Did you stay all night at a cow camp back there about ten miles?"

"Why, yes, I lost my way coming across the range and——"

"That's all we want to know," interrupted Hutch. "Now we're goin' to invite yuh back, kinda gentle-like, an' be kind enough to give yuh a lesson in washin' dishes and cleanin' up in general. Hombre, you're in a cow country now an' the first law of the land is to leave yer camp open fer anybody to use what happens along. The second law is laid down fer him as happens along, an' it is to wash the dishes after yuh've fed yer face in a cow camp when the punchers is gone. Seein' as yuh don't savvy nothin' about that second epistle, whilst knowin' all about the first, we've taken it as our dooty to learn yuh. Turn that hoss 'round an' hit it out back the way yuh come."

"Gentlemen, I knew that rule," began the offender, "but as I said I lost my way and was far behind time when——"

"No back-talk," put in Stub, waving a six-shooter in his hand. "If yuh knowed that rule and didn't live up to it, us honest cowhands has got to show yuh the terror of yer ways."

"But listen, boys, let me explain——"

"No explainin' can clean up them dirty dishes and that kitchen," contributed Scoops. "Not another word out of you, or you might never talk again."

With that remark he gave the stranger's horse a heavy whack with a piece of rope. Hutch and Stub maneuvered their ponies to head the horse back toward the hut while the frightened rider pulled for leather.

"Men, in the name of heaven," he implored, "let me explain this situ——"

Bang! Bang!

The first shot came from Hutch's gun and the bullet knocked the hat from the terrified young rider's head. Stub's bullet ripped through the flowing tail of the fellow's coat.

"Another word from you an' I'll shoot to kill," warned Hutch angrily.

Back along the trail they galloped, the three trailing their captive. When his horse slowed down, somebody gave him another

vicious blow with a rope and on they sped. Once the poor fellow ventured to look back, but two .45's were flourished threateningly and he set his face grimly to the front again.

"Look at 'im holdin' on to the saddlehorn like he was tryin' to choke a Gila monster to death and it right on 'im," laughed Stub under his breath.

"The poor necktie-thrower will wish he was fightin' a whole corral full of Gila monsters 'fore we git through with 'im," declared Hutch earnestly.

"This is what school teachers calls a object lesson," Scoops told them, remembering what the last schoolma'am over in Red Canyon had said once.

The steaming horses were pulled up at the hut and the captive received orders in no uncertain language to march inside and face his crime of crimes. Once more he tried to plead for a hearing, but he was hushed up promptly and ushered into the hut.

"Now take off that coat and git to work," Stub ordered, poking him in the ribs with his six-gun. "We're all set to give yuh what is called a objection lesson, which means yuh do the work and make yer objections afterwards. Now do everything we say and no talkin'. Hold yer tongue just as tight as yuh did that saddlehorn comin' here. The first word from yuh, I'll twist a bullet through that long hair of yorn. The next one I'll aim at one of them freckles on yer nose when yuh're lookin' square at me."

The captive took Stub at his word and set to work in obedient silence. Stub had him pile up the dishes and clean off the syrup spilt on the table while Hutch built a fire and started breakfast. Then the trio proceeded to dirty cooking vessels about as fast as their servant for the time could keep them washed. Sometimes all three punchers were handing him dishes, pots, and pans at the same time, and he managed to take them all.

"Don't eat too much," cautioned Stub as the punchers partook of breakfast at last, "or you won't be able to git yer share of the weddin' supper. It shore would be tough if we got left on that!"

"If which case happens," replied Scoops, "I'll take it out in kissin' the bride."

"I'll bet my ol' Coffeyville saddle," twitted the ever-observant Hutch, "that yuh already tried that, Scoops, in the days before Miss Grace went off to college an' met this stray she's marryin'."

While Hutch and Stub laughed at Scoops' expense, the dishwasher, who had been standing wide-eyed during the talk about the wedding, now ventured forward a step and gulped.

"Talking of the wedding, boys," he began hesitatingly, "I'd like to——"

"Shut up," roared Scoops, grabbing his gun and thereby diverting interest from himself.

The prisoner jumped to one side as if trying to dodge the expected bullets, and retreated to his dishpan.

"Say," observed Stub, now enjoying the situation to the utmost, "the way he minds in the kitchen, I'll bet he's married and got a old lady what waves the rollin' pin faster than flyin' whiskey bottles in a barroom free-for-all."

"No, he ain't," Hutch opined, "er he wouldn't of left the dishes not washed in the first place. They gits broke offul quick when a woman gits a-holt of the reins. I'd ruther be a ol' broke-down chuck wagon hoss, sore-backed an' tender-mouthed, than one of these married critters with a woman a-fork my back all the time."

"Some of 'em sure do have fightin' blood in 'em," reflected Scoops, the historian of parts. "Look at Joan of the Ark. If it hadn't been for her, old Andy Jackson never would have licked the English at New Orleans. She was a fightin' filly if there ever was one. No wonder old Napoleon said it was his Waterloo when he hitched up to that gal, her with the reins in her teeth and all set to be queen of France."

"Boys, it's gittin' up in the day," reminded Stub. "We'd better start dressin'. It's a long ride over to headquarters."

"That's right," replied Hutch, "an' that gives me another idee. It's about the date I oughta change underwear an' seein' it's Miss Grace's weddin', I'll change right now an' give this young gent permission to do my washin' afore he leaves. If you boys

has got anything to be scrubbed up, jist put 'er in, fer I know our new hand over there is dyin' to do somethin' more fer us."

"Men, for God's sake listen to me!" blurted out the captive. "I'm the one that's——"

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Scoops and Stub had expected such an outbreak and were ready for it. With the first shot cutting off the fellow's passionate plea the plate he held in his hand was shattered to the floor. A tin bucket came banging down from the wall just behind him and one bullet hit the stove and splashed lead back near the prisoner's face as he dodged down.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried, scrambling behind the stove. "I'll shut up."

"Don't fergit any more, then," warned Hutch, "fer I ain't had my shot yit, an' I don't miss like these boys what's learnin' to shoot at human flesh. Now, boys, let's git that washin' ready."

The three cowpunchers went here and there gathering every soiled article that could possibly go into the tub. During this gathering of laundry Hutch and Scoops went into the bunkroom while Stub went out to the corral fence to add his saddle blankets to the collection. Seeing a favorable moment then, the prisoner slipped out the kitchen door and made a break for his horse in front of the hut. He was almost to the animal when Stub raised the alarm.

"Leave him to me," cried Hutch, dashing out.

The fleeing man, now frightened into irresponsibility, leaped into his saddle and began spurring at his horse without unhitching him from the fence. He soon saw his mistake and sprang off to grab the reins, but by the time he was in the saddle again and under way, Hutch came galloping close behind him, twirling a rope.

With the first throw the expert roper settled his loop over the fellow's head, and the cow pony promptly sat back on his haunches. The lassoed man was jerked backward from the horse, and he hit the ground with a thud.

"You've knocked 'im loco," said Stub, coming up.

"He'll jist have that much more sense when he does come 'round," replied Hutch. "He's comin' to now."

"Make 'im come back and finish up," said Scoops. "Get up, hombre, and be careful the next time about outlawin' the washtub and dish pan too pronto."

"Men," murmured the recaptured one, rubbing an eye already swelling shut, "you're going to pay for——"

"Didn't I say no back talk!" cried Hutch, jerking the rope so hard that it choked back the victim's words. "Now back to that tub."

More enthusiastically than ever now the laundry tub was piled higher and higher. The man uttered a pitiful groan as he bent over the unfinished task.

"Don't yuh reckon he's had about enough?" suggested Stub, beginning to feel sorry for their victim.

"I'm satisfied," Scoops answered.

"Me, too," agreed Hutch, "if yuh think we've persecuted our dooty to a sufficiency."

"Come here, cowboy," called Stub to the prisoner. "We've decided to let yuh off kinda light this time. Now the next time yuh pertake of us punchers' bed and board, why don't git in too big a hurry to go prancin' off, to the county seat or any other pair of sidewalks. Yuh can go ahead and finish the objection lesson now by tellin' us yer objection to what we've jist suppressed into yer mind."

"Well, I was in a hurry," explained the young traveler at last, "because I——"

"And don't never git it into yer head," broke in Hutch as a final warning, "that we couldn't git rough if we was forced to it. We're jist lettin' yuh off light 'cause we seen yuh was not altogether unpromisin' fer a good hand some of these days, if yuh'd lay off some of them fine duds an' git to know us fellers better."

"The reason I was in a hurry," went on the man when permitted, "is due to the fact that I was supposed to be at Mr. Anderson's place last night. But I lost my way over the mountain and had to stop here last night after dark. My dad and brother went around in a stagecoach but I had to ride across the range in order to come by the county seat and get the license. You see,

I am the young 'stray' that Miss Grace is going to marry."

The three punchers remained frozen in their tracks. Scoops Foster's large, scooped mouth was agape and his protruding blue eyes got bigger and bigger. Hutch Bowman stared at the groom-to-be as though he had a sudden wish he were a ghost that would vanish into the washtub. Stub stood by and batted his eyes in undisguised consternation.

"You've put me and everybody in a terrible fix," continued the man of matrimonial bent. "There is to be a big crowd there and the wedding was set for three o'clock. But I've got to go to the courthouse yet for my license—and then hit the trail for Anderson's after that."

"Great heavens!" moaned Hutch. "That will make you three or four hours late the very best you can do. But why didn't yuh tell us all this to start with!" he flared up. "Don't they know how to speak up in emergencies back where you come from? Stub, grab yer hoss an' ride with this feller to show 'im the way."

"And show 'im how to ride like hell," added Scoops. "See if you can't beat old Paul Revere's record the time he rode to Sheridan twenty miles away by lantern light."

Scoops and Hutch watched the pair of horsemen thunder down the trail, then turned to their own mounts.

"Come smell my breath, Scoops," requested Hutch. "Am I drunk or how under the blazin' ol' Sol did sich a mess git diluted onto us?"

"We was just plain loco for not lettin' that hombre talk when he wanted to so bad," declared Scoops. "The next time a dude wants to *habla* with me I'm goin' to set down right square in front of 'im and bore bigger holes in my ears so he can see I'm tryin' to listen. Now we got to hurry over there and try to fix this up with the boss. But more than likely we'll be fired so fast our broncs will pitch us over their heads turnin' around."

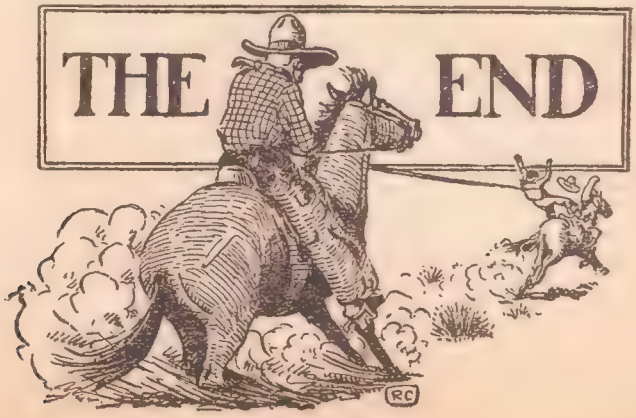
"I reckon we will," bemoaned Hutch. "No, Scoops, he jist couldn't fire us. We've been here about long enough to lay claim to this place, jobs and all. Why, the durned hut was named for me a dozen years ago. Besides, it was all the fault of the freckle-faced little yearlin' anyway, fer not spillin' it right out who he was."

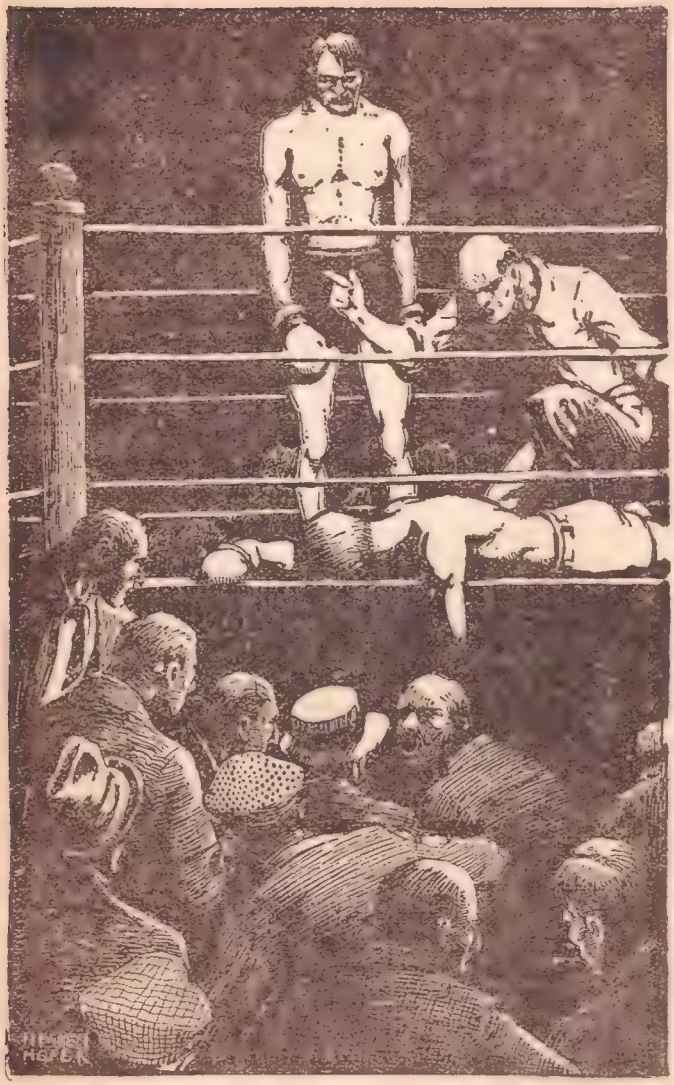
Scoops only grinned at the last remark.

"Anyway," he vowed, "when there's another weddin' on hand and dishes to wash too, I'm goin' to salt said dishes down on the north side of the hut and leave 'em until the celebratin' is over."

"Looks like the boss oughta see our side of it," hoped Hutch as they got into their saddles.

"Can't be helped now if he don't," Scoops answered, "but I reckon he will. Anyway, I'm ridin' right over, bold as they make 'em. I feel just like old Julius Caesar did when he cast the dye into the river and turned 'er a ruby red."





THE POWDER PUFF

By Bud Jones

The Blowback Kid, famous fight manager, undertakes the training of a college lad. He is a queer and silent one, this college lad. Blowback knows the fistic game from punching bags to knockout blows, yet his new charge hands him a real surprise as to what a man will do in the padded arena.

"TWO things greater than all things are:

The first is Love and the second is War."

If you're willing to take the word of Mr. Rudyard Kipling for it, a camel chauffeur by the name Mahbub Ali unloaded the above observation during a lull in the conversation about the campfire one evening. According to Mr. Kipling, the whiskers of this Mahbub Ali was full of mutton stew at the time the crack was made, which is mentioned here only to leave you see that a stew in the bush ain't got nothing to do with the subject in hand. Mahbub Ali was no crackpot.

There is no occasion for anyone to take a run-out powder on me at this junction in the belief that I am about to get sentimental. Business first, so long as it don't interfere with pleasure, is my motto. Mahbub Ali and his wisecrack is dragged into the gathering simply as a clever ruse on my part to bring up the subject of J. Warren Mathews, Jr., without shaking up the boys and gals on the back seat, and at the same time to leave everybody know that when it comes to first division literature, I ain't no slow leak, even if I do sound like it.

Pull out the wall bed, make yourself at home, and I'll develop the theme.

There is nothing sensational about the début of J. Warren Mathews, Jr., into the Realm of the Scrambled Ear. The Blowback Kid is holding the clock on Terrence

McDuff when J. Warren, looking like he just stepped outa an ad for college clothes, finds his way into the Manhattan gymnasium.

"I want to fight," says J. Warren without preliminaries.

"Is that a statement or an invitation, and are you talking to me?" inquires Blowback without looking around.

"It's a statement, and I'm talking to you. I want to fight."

"Go ahead," Blowback tells him.

"Listen!" J. Warren lays a large hand on the Blowback Kid's shoulder and whirls him around. "I want to fight; I want to fight professionally, and I want you to handle me."

For a minute it looks like he's going to get what he asks for. The Blowback Kid looks him over coldly from head to foot, and stifles that impulse for no good reason at all, except that J. Warren stretches approximately six feet, looks like 180 pounds, and has a cold gleam in his eye.

Blowback pockets his watch.

"Who sent for you?" he asks sarcastic.

"No one," J. Warren admits. "George Drake told me you knew more about handling boxers than any other man in Southern California and told me to come to see you. I guess he must of been kidding me."

"That's right; you're wrong," says Blowback. "Where'd *you* come from, and where'd you ever do any *fighting?*"

"I came from George Drake," the college lad informs him. "And I boxed a bit, off and on, at college."

"What's your name?"

"J. Warren Mathews, Jr."

"I asked for your name, not your pedigree," suggests Blowback. "You never win any starts packing extra weight like that."

"I hardly think my name will prove a handicap," says J. Warren calmly.

"You may be right," Blowback agrees, "but if you're going to fight for me you'll have to give that title the air and get a name or a number."

"Suit yourself. I want to fight."

"So I understand. Show up here to-morrow in working clothes at 2 o'clock. And," he adds, "don't bring Lulu."

J. Warren Mathews, Jr., looks his prospective manager coolly in the eye for about five seconds, before he turns on his heel and takes the air.

"Where," inquires the Blowback Kid, "did that paluka break out from?"

In his street clothes J. Warren Mathews, Jr., has all the earmarks of a athaleke; in trunks and boxing shoes he looks like one of them Greek demijohns. He's got the shoulders of a heavyweight, the waist of a society girl, and the legs of a runner. In addition to which, he exhibits a pair of arms that was never developed doing fancy work.

"What was you studying at college—boiler making?" queries Blowback when J. Warren presents himself for his tryout.

"No," J. Warren answers seriously. "Banking."

"A bookkeeper, eh? Well, tear into 'Concrete' and let's see did you learn any boxing."

J. Warren climbs soberly into the training ring and squares off in a businesslike manner to Romeo Ragan.

On the chance that you don't remember Romeo, we'll take time out here for a brief explanation. Romeo is a tough, rough middleweight which can double for Joe Martin without make-up, and which can take more punishment than Delilah give Sampson. A punch on the chin don't mean no more to Romeo than a horseshow to Henry Ford—where there ain't no sense, there ain't no feeling. If Romeo is as strong in the head as he is in the chin, he would of been a college professor, and if he can think as hard as he can sock, he could tell you offhand how old is Ann.

He's fought everybody of his weight but Gen. Pershing and Nick Altrock and, while his record don't make him look like the next 158-pound champeen, it don't make him look like no cup custard, either. The boys which ain't got no taste for tin ears and broken-down arches in their nose ain't choosing Romeo casual. In a word or two, Blowback's middleweight is half-baked and hard-boiled.

Romeo ain't wasting no time while I'm giving you his autobiography. He starts shooting and he keeps shooting like J. Warren is something which he should ought to get in the afternoon mail. But from where

me and Blowback's setting, it's apparent that Romeo ain't doing himself no more good than a Florida real estate agent mailing circulars to an inhabitant of California. Romeo has tried everything but a half Nelson up to this time, and as far as it's visible to the nude optic, he ain't laid a glove on J. Warren higher than the elbow yet. While Romeo ain't no boxing master, he's hep to all the tricks of the game and he can lay down a fair barrage of leather. J. Warren is going along easy, blocking, slipping and shifting before Romeo's onslaught like he's taking his daily dozen and ain't getting no particular kick outa it.

At the end of the first three minutes, when the Blowback Kid calls time, J. Warren is breathing like a baby, and Romeo is commencing to get sore.

"Speed up a bit," Blowback tells the newcomer, "and let's see can you punch. You ain't led yet."

Romeo tears into the college boy again, and me and Blowback gets a eyeful of some of the nicest timed counter-punching that we've looked at in some time. Every time Romeo starts a punch he gets hooked, jabbed and crossed so fast it makes his eyes water, and his punches either go touring or wind up on J. Warren's elbows and shoulders.

We've seen a lot of good counter-punching, Terrence McDuff, Blowback's bantamweight protégé, being one of the sweetest youngsters on the Coast, but person'ly, I never see anybody heavier than a lightweight which can get more service outa a pair of ten-ounce Levinsons than this collegiate.

"He knows his way around a ring," says I.

Blowback nods thoughtfully.

"Quit pulling your punches," he tells J. Warren. "Romeo can swallow leather like a flapper takes gin. *Sock* him."

"Is that a necessity?" asks J. Warren.

"Well," Blowback opines, "it don't come under the head of a *luxury* and it won't hurt Concrete. I'd like to see can you *hit*."

"I'd prefer to demonstrate on the sandbag."

"What's the matter—you got brittle hands?"

"Hardly," J. Warren smiles. "I dislike hitting a sparring partner when there is no occasion for so doing."

The Blowback Kid swallows a couple times.

"Say!" he explodes. "Do you want to fight or do you want to play puss-in-the-corner? Hop to it now, and let's see can you *hit*. Tear into him, Concrete."

And Romeo tears.

Calm as a champeen, the collegiate meets Romeo's rushes, catching punches out in front of him, ducking, slipping and shifting while he is laying three gloves on Romeo's head and body for every one Romeo *starts* at him. Romeo's doing his stuff. J. Warren hooks with a left to the body and with the same hand to the head, almost in the same motion, shifts away from Romeo's lacing left and crosses with his right. If Romeo takes one punch, he takes fifty during the short three minutes of the round—and the fifty punches put into one sock wouldn't rock a lady school teacher, so easy is J. Warren laying them on.

"Enough," growls Blowback. "You box like Abe Attell and you sock like you come from a long line of female impersonators. What's on your mind? You couldn't fight your way outa a hat sack punching like that."

"I told you," J. Warren says coolly, "that there was no occasion for hitting. It would have done me no good and it might have hurt Romeo."

"Cranberries," sneers Romeo.

"And boloney," adds Blowback.

Just the same, before J. Warren leaves the gymnasium his name's on a contract, and his future's in the hands of the Blowback Kid.

"That handle you got don't go," Blowback advises. "From here in you're 'California Tommy' Burns. Get that."

"What's in a name," smiles J. Warren. "That which we call a rose by any other name——"

"That which we call a rose ain't got nothing to do with it," interrupted his new manager. "You're 'California Tommy' Burns, and if you live up to that combination, you'll be something for your old man to tell the neighbors about."

"I wonder," says J. Warren softly. "I wonder."

"And I wonder," says the Blowback Kid, as J. Warren does a fadeout without further words, "is that baby a crackpot, or is he something the angels sent me?"

"That which we call a rose," Romeo cuts in, "don't eat hard-boiled eggs because he can't crack the shells offen 'em. Ain't he a laugh?"

"Take the air," says Blowback shortly. "If he's a laugh, you stop the show. See can you get any comfort outa that."

Before alias California Tommy Burns is in the Blowback Kid's stable a week, he's booked for the Hollywood arena in a semi-wind-up position, the collegiate's flashy gymnasium manners having been brought to the attention of the Cinema Center matchmaker. "California Tommy" breezes in under wraps to cop the nod, but he don't do himself no good with his new manager. He has laid approximately 4,582 gloves on his opponent during the six rounds, without leaving a mark. He has hooked, jabbed and uppercut with every punch in the dictionary, and he has showed everybody present just how six-ounce gloves should ought to be laid on, but he *hasn't* showed anybody a punch that would knock a baby loose from its bottle.

Despite the fact that nothing pleases the average fan so much as a bucket or two of red gore and a slap-down every canto or so, the Hollywood gang takes to J. Warren. No question, he's a marvel of boxing precision, perfect timing and exact judgment of distance. He's a second Young Griffo—beautiful in action, a piece of boxing machinery, and as dangerous as a maiden aunt. When he leaves the ring he gets a big hand from the bugs, but he don't get no hand from the Blowback Kid.

"Do you know this pigeon you was waltzing with to-night?" asks Blowback.

"No," says J. Warren.

"He ain't no relation of yours?"

"Certainly not," the collegiate tells him, puzzled.

"Funny," Blowback growls. "It looked to me like you was trying to keep him from falling down. Was you afraid he'd break?"

"The poor chap," J. Warren answers, "was helpless. He has no business in the ring. He couldn't protect himself from a baby."

"You ain't threw into that ring to protect nobody but yourself." Blowback is peevish. "Romeo'd of finished him in one round."

"I expect he would," J. Warren comes back.

Strange as it may seem, Romeo Ragan's aversion to J. Warren on the grounds that he is a powder puff, disappears with this first start at Hollywood. Romeo and J. Warren are as much alike as Bull Montana and the Prince of Wales, which proba'ly accounts for Romeo's change of pace, if anything can account for Romeo or anything he does. At that, Romeo's got the heart of a big kid and shoots square. He says what he means and means what he says. And you can't help liking this big college boy.

This don't mean that Romeo slows up in his ambition to knock J. Warren out a window every time they get together in the training ring. Business is business with Romeo, and Romeo's business is knocking folks for a gargle of arsenic. The only reason he hasn't put J. Warren on the couch long ago is because, as Romeo himself observes, "you can't hit 'em if you can't catch 'em." However, while Romeo is willing to pat J. Warren into a state of coma as a matter of professional ethics, he ain't standing by while anyone else does any patting with J. Warren as the pattee.

"Listen," he tells the Blowback Kid. "Lay off this college kid. He's kayo, don't get mixed up on that, and don't never figure him for a pigeon. Give him a chance. He don't need to sock and you can't handle him like he come out of an alley. The boy's class."

"Who," demands Blowback sarcastic, "give you the idea that you was a lecturer? And since when you started stringing with powder puffs?"

"I ain't stringing with nothing," says Romeo stubbornly. "And I ain't stringing you. I'm telling you something."

If the truth of the matter was made public, the Blowback Kid is sweet on J. Warren himself. Youngsters which can peddle punches, no matter what kind of punches they are, like J. Warren can peddle 'em,

don't come in case lots, and Blowback ain't overlooking no bets. He ties J. Warren's left hand to his side and sends him in against Romeo.

"You'll knock Concrete into the rafters with that right hand, or he'll knock you out into Spring Street with his," Blowback tells him. "Let's see can you sock *now*."

With his hand tied, J. Warren does a fair job of keeping out of Romeo's way through his flashy footwork and some nifty one-handed blocking, and Romeo don't show no disposition to take advantage of the situation.

"Lovely blankety blank!!" raves Blowback. "What's the matter with you, Concrete? Tear into him!"

"Act your age," Romeo tells him calmly. "I ain't picking on cripples and I never yet took no cuts at no blind men or old ladies. Ontie that hand and I'll cut loose."

And Terrence McDuff ain't no better. Terrence is willing to box with J. Warren hogtied, but he ain't willing to sock, even if J. Warren weighs around sixty pounds heavier than he does.

"Boiled apples," he says disgusted, after Blowback rides him for pulling his punches. "Whata you think I am?"

So Blowback takes the shackles off J. Warren and puts him to work on the sandbag.

"I don't understand it," he tells me one afternoon as we're watching J. Warren worry the bag. "Look at them arms, and look at them hitting muscles in his back. He should ought to be able to level the Statute of Liberty with one punch, but the minute he gets in the ring with something human, he gets sleeping sickness in his arms. It's past me."

"Maybe," says I, "he's got a complex."

"Yeah," growls Blowback, "and maybe he's got a floating chin which he's afraid somebody's going to pat if he leaves himself open long enough to start socking. He's done win one start and been boxing in the gymasium for two weeks and I never yet see him hit on the chin, or any place else much. I wonder is that the answer."

J. Warren's second appearance is a good deal like the first. He wins in a walk for the simple reason that the boy he's boxing don't lay a half-dozen gloves on him all evening, and those that do find him just get there or park while he's going away. His opponent is wore out from waving and is almost smothered by the gloves which he has in his face constantly, but he leaves the ring without a mark on him. J. Warren gets another big hand from the customers and another big Bronx cheer from Blowback.

"That cut of French pastry just *can't* hit," Blowback tells me that night. "I got him figured out. He's one of those freaks that has co-ordination of the hand and eye like Young Griffo. He learns to box like a seal learns to eat fish—it just comes natural—and that let's him out. Romeo knows more tricks of the game and real *fighting* manners than this baby will learn in two years. He's picked up his boxing so fast it hasn't had time to digest. He don't know *how* to hit. And who do you think he wants me to get for him?"

"I'll ask," says I.

"Nobody," Blowback snorts, "but 'Sailor' Fitzgibbons. He wants to toy with the light heavyweight champeen of the Pacific fleet his third time out. Can you get a laugh or something outa that?"

"He may look like a charlotte russe, but there's no Barnaby about him, at that," says I. "The boy's got heart."

"Leave him alone and he'll come home," Terrence cuts in. "And he won't have no mud in his ears, neither."

Just what J. Warren does when he ain't working in the gym, nobody knows. Romeo and Terrence has been to picture shows with him a couple time, and all of us has dinner with him one night at an uptown hotel. Outside of which, we're as hep to his family affairs as if we'd never heard of him. He's always friendly and willing to mix, but he ain't putting out no information about his private business, which don't hurt his record none with any of us. Terrence and Romeo are under Blowback's eye twenty-three of the twenty-four hours, but J. Warren goes his own sweet way after he leaves the gym.

"I don't want to get personal," Blowback suggests to him one day, "and I don't care where you eat and sleep. But I would like

to know what you eat and how much shut-eye you're taking."

"I'm doing just what you tell me to do," says J. Warren. "Don't worry about me. I got too much at stake to overlook anything that will improve me."

And Blowback leaves it go at that.

All around J. Warren's something of a mystery, not only to us, but to everyone on Tin Ear Alley.

Then one day Little Girl Blue walks into the gym. Terrence gives her the name, account of her eyes and the blue that's always somewhere in her uniform. With me, women is like horses; what I mean is I can gen'ally tell with one eye shut are they just selling-platters or something else again. You don't have to give a thoroughbred more than a casual once-around before you're Solomon to the fact that they're thoroughbreds. It's like that with Little Girl Blue. Slim and blonde, with the skin you love to touch, and just reeking of class. The minute I see her I know she's one of the answer to J. Warren.

The Blowback Kid's in the office punching the bag with Jerry McCarthy and Ed O'Malley, Romeo's on his back in a far corner of the gym taking stomach exercises, and Terrence hasn't showed up yet. J. Warren's at the sandbag, his back to the door, grunting with every punch and lathered like Paul Revere's horse.

Little Girl Blue takes a quick look around, walks up to within ten feet of J. Warren, and stands watching him with a funny expression on her face for perhaps a minute before J. Warren wheels suddenly and stands facing her, his mouth open and his arms hanging loose at his sides. He looked like he'd been hit on the solar plexus.

"You!" he says finally. "You! What are you doing here?"

Little Girl Blue takes a quick breath.

"I might ask you the same question," she says coolly.

"Why, I—I— that is— I——" stammers J. Warren.

"Yes, I know, Warren," she says coming up close to him and looking him in the eye. "I know. I saw your picture in a sporting sheet and I had to come."

"I'm sorry, Betty," J. Warren's getting hold of himself. "Why don't you let me alone?"

"You know why, Warren," says Little Girl Blue softly, laying a hand on his sweaty arm. "It's as much my fight as it is yours. I've come to stay."

I may have my faults, but tuning in on somebody else's wave length ain't one of 'em. I take a Palmer House for myself, and whatever J. Warren and Little Girl Blue has to say to each other is something I don't know nothing about.

She's gone when the Blowback Kid and I come out of the office.

The next three weeks are busy ones for alias California Tommy Burns. Four fights he gets under his belt in that time, the last one being a main event at the Olympic Club in which he shows the bugs so many soft gloves that they forget there is such a thing as a knock-out. He picked up a hundred tricks of the ring in the few weeks he's with Blowback, and you can tell the cock-eyed world he's something of a boxer. The one-dollar boys tear the roof off every time he enters the ring, and his main event at the Olympic showed him the favorite, in spite of the fact that he's tangling with a New York light heavyweight that has been knocking over a lot of good boys.

Incidentally, this paluka slaps J. Warren to the canvas for a short count in the seventh round with one of the few real punches he lands, but the collegiate demonstrates he can take it by coming back and showering the visiting fisticuffer with so many gloves from then on that there's no question about the decision.

"And still he can't hit," Blowback wails. "If he could punch hard enough to dent a derby, I wouldn't be afraid to send him in against Dempsey."

It's a few days after this last bout that the warship which is decorated with the presence of Sailor Fitzgibbons makes port, and it's approximately at this time that I get an unexpected call from Little Girl Blue. It's the first time anyone has seen her since the day she showed up at the gym.

"Warren has told me about you, Mr. Brennan," says she without preliminaries, slipping her little gloved hand into mine.

"I'm in trouble, and I know from what Warren has told me, that you're the kind which would help most anybody in distress."

"You're giving me the best of it, young lady," says I. "But anyone who wouldn't give you a hand any time has got some sort of complex. What you and Warren been doing?"

"If you'd only be good enough to let me tell you all about it," she begs, her big blue eyes all clouded up with trouble.

"You just unload," I tells her, "and if there's anything I can do to help you and this college lad, it's done."

"Thank you," she says simply, pulling me down onto a bench beside her. And while she's hanging onto one of my hands with both of her little ones, like a kid that's afraid of the dark, she drags out the skeleton in J. Warren's closet.

"First," she says a little shakily, "I want to tell you that Warren's the finest boy that ever lived. You can't know how really fine he is. His father's a big business man—head of Mathews, Inc., Importers. You may have heard of him. His mother is the kind of woman you'd expect Warren to have for a mother. Both are heartbroken. Until a few weeks ago when I found Warren's picture in a paper as 'California Tommy' Burns, none of us knew where he was. He left without seeing either his father or mother. He wrote me a brief note. 'When I'm worthy of you, I'll come back.' That's all it said, but I knew what it meant. I was engaged to him; we have been sweethearts ever since our high school days. Warren would have graduated from Stanford in June.

"Please don't laugh, Mr. Brennan, however funny it may be to you. It's real to Warren and me.

"The night of the Stanford-California game Warren and I were in the grill at one of the big hotels in San Francisco. Everyone was hilarious. You know how they are after the big game. It was about 11 o'clock when Warren excused himself for a minute and went to a nearby table to speak to a party of Stanford boys. I was alone at the table near one of the doors when a party of three men came into the grill. They weren't students. One of them—the biggest one—came straight to my table after he had looked the room over. I couldn't believe he was going to speak to me. Without warning he put his hand under my chin and forced me to look at him.

" 'Give your sheik the air, cutie, and come along with me,' he said.

"I was paralyzed with astonishment for an instant, and before I had recovered, Warren was back and had slapped him across the mouth. He knocked Warren down. Warren got up and dived for him, only to be knocked down again. Five times before waiters, students and police interfered, Warren was knocked down. The last time he was unconscious.

"The man was arrested, of course, but Warren wouldn't appear against him, and he wouldn't let anyone else appear.

" 'A police court is no place to thrash this thing out,' he said. 'I'm sorry, Betty, that I wasn't man enough to take care of you.'

"That was all. He left that night, and I had never seen him since until I found him here.

"You have guessed why Warren is fighting as a professional. Before he came to Mr. Blowback, he had boxed every day for months under a boxing instructor at the athletic club here. He'll never quit until he has wiped out the insult to me with his fists. His father's like that. And until he quits we can't be mar— mar— mar——"

The tears has been gathering in the kid's blue eyes ever since Warren takes his first knock-down, and now they're running over. She's crying like any little girl in trouble, and she's forgotten that I'm practically a stranger. Her head's pillowed against my arm.

Don't laugh—there's nothing to laugh at.

"There, there," I tells her. "Don't cry. Everything will come out all right. Your Warren will find this ash can and knock him for a loop, and you'll be married and live happily ever after."

"— I— can't wai— wai— wait any longer," she sobs. "I lu— lu— love him too mu— much."

"He listens like he's worth loving," says I. "Get yourself straightened out, and we'll talk the thing over."

She quiets down in a minute, dabbing at her eyes with a sample blue handkerchief, and doing her best to promote a smile and be herself again.

"Now," I su'gests, "tell me what I can do to help you two kids and we'll see what can be done."

"The man who insulted me and knocked Warren down is a professional fighter," she explains in jerks, dabbing with that little mouchoir. "If you could only arrange it so Warren can fight him in the ring, I know Warren would beat him and everything would be all right."

"Who is he?" I asks.

"His name," says Little Girl Blue, "is 'Sailor' Fitzgibbons, and he's champeen of the Rocky Mountains or something."

Allah be praised!

All J. Warren's got to do to ease his conscience is hand a lacing to Sailor Fitzgibbons, light heavyweight champeen of the Pacific fleet, and the toughest, sockingest leather-thrower the bounding ocean has produced since Tom Sharkey. I'd rather have the bubonic plague than J. Warren's conscience.

Before I'm recovered from the shock, the girl has made me promise that I'll do everything I can to promote the massacre for J. Warren, and that I'll tell nobody his story, especially "Mr. Blowback." She's gone before the rest of the gang show up.

J. Warren is something of a boxer, as I may have mentioned before, and he's breezed through his first half-dozen starts without working up a good sweat. But revenging an insult on the person of Sailor Fitzgibbons is a horse from another express company. However, a promise to a lady is a promise to a lady, and if being threw into a 24-foot ring with Sailor Fitzgibbons is going to give J. Warren any satisfaction and make his little sweetie happy, I'm going to do everything I can to throw him in.

Napoleon never had nothing on J. Warren when it comes to being ambitious.

We're lucky, or unlucky, whichever way you want to look at it. Sailor Fitzgibbons, fresh from the briny deep, is craving action, and no one to give it to him. Light heavyweights good enough to be tossed to the man-eating gob ain't coming in on every train. J. Warren's the only possible match in prospect for him.

"Get me Fitzgibbons and I'll beat him in less than fifteen minutes," J. Warren begs Blowback when he finds out the sailor is ashore and craving raw meat.

"Keep your poise," Blowback tells him. "Everybody, Sailor Fitzgibbons included, knows you're a powder puff socker. You can't beat boys like this gob by dusting off their face for them. You gotta sock—SOCK—SOCK, and keep on socking. Do you get me? He'd give you housemaid's knees so fast it would make your eyes water. This baby's a straight-eight socker."

"I know what he is," says J. Warren stubbornly. "Get me Fitzgibbons. He couldn't lay a glove on me in *twenty* rounds."

"You gotta great taste for knick-knacks," observes the Blowback Kid.

Nevertheless, the week ain't out before J. Warren and Sailor Fitzgibbons has their names on the dotted line for a main event at the Olympic Club, mainly because, as I said, they's no one else to feed the sailor, and he packs 'em in no matter who the victim is.

The Blowback Kid may not be optimistic concerning J. Warren's chances for putting the sailor on the couch, or for sticking the ten rounds with him, as far as that goes, but he ain't overlooking no bets. The big collegiate gets all the attention during the next two weeks that Blowback knows how to give, and if there's anybody knows more about it than Blowback, I don't know who it is. J. Warren himself forgets everything else and plows into the grind, while both Romeo and Terrence catches the fever and plows in with him. It's a busy two weeks, and the end of it finds J. Warren in shape to give everything he's got to wipe out the insult and burnish up the old family escutcheon.

I'd give a ten-case note to slip the low-down to Blowback, Romeo and Terrence and leave them in on the excitement, but a promise is a promise and I've got to keep the muffler on the broadcasting layout.

During the last ten days before the battle, Little Girl Blue, who has been introduced all around, never misses a day at the gymnasium. As a matter of fact, she has been adopted into the family, and instead of one

admirer, she now has four. Mornings she paces J. Warren, who generally has both Romeo and Terrence with him on the road, leading the way in a roadster which sets somebody back no fewer than five cold grand. Afternoons, she holds the clock on J. Warren as he goes through his six, eight and ten rounds with Romeo and Terrence.

And when J. Warren steps into the ring to ease his conscience on the person of Sailor Fitzgibbons, light heavyweight champeen of "the Rocky Mountains or something," she's in a press seat right up against her Warren's corner.

The incident of the former meeting with J. Warren has completely slipped the sailor's mind. He don't show that he's ever seen California Tommy Burns before, and I'll say for J. Warren that he holds himself in hand like a hard-boiled champeen. While the boys are getting their instructions in the center of the ring, the sailor pulls that old one of asking the referee what shall he do when he knocks J. Warren down.

"So's your old man, you four-flusher," J. Warren tells him calmly.

Which starts the boys off on a friendly footing.

Blowback, or nobody else who knows anything about the styles of the two boys, expects J. Warren to do anything but stick the distance. There's no chance for him to win on points, one good sock being worth twenty of the lady fingers the collegiate puts out. The odds on the sea-going socker are as high as three to one, with plenty of two-to-one money that J. Warren don't go the route.

Blowback has brought the collegiate along with the idea that there ain't a chance for him to stop the gob, and that the only chance to stay on his feet ten rounds is a lot of first division defensive boxing. No cream puff socker like J. Warren is going to slow the sailor up at any point along the route—and that's not intermediate.

When the gong sends the boys at each other, Little Girl Blue has a grip on my arm which would of strangled a bull, and her eyes is riveted on the big collegiate.

The sailor, an ugly leer on his face, contents himself the first round with feeling J. Warren out. J. Warren, as cool as an absinthe frappé, boxes his way to an easy edge.

Towards the close of the second round, the sailor cuts loose with both hands after J. Warren has give him a mustache with a left hook to the nose, and for a time it looks like he's going to run the collegiate down and assassinate him. J. Warren shows some flashy footwork in this hole, and in the middle of the barrage catches the sailor off balance with a straight left to the chin to end the sally. It's an exhibition of defensive boxing that brings the bugs outa their chairs.

Little Girl Blue has been on her feet since the offensive started, her hands clenched and her eyes glued to the near tragedy in the corner above her. With the gong, the little thoroughbred slips back into her seat, trembling from head to foot.

The Blowback Kid, cursing softly between instructions, is straddling the second strand and holding J. Warren's tights away from him to get the air which Romeo is frantically stirring with a big fan, while Terrence is working expertly on the leg and arm muscles.

"There's a lot more of that coming," Blowback croaks in J. Warren's ear. "Keep your left in his face. He knows you can't hit and he's going to come wide open from here in. Stay out of the corners and keep away from him as much as you can. You can outbox him at long range."

Blowback's right. The sailor comes out swinging in the third and keeps swinging, as J. Warren, boxing like a machine, gives way before him, jabbing and hooking with an accurate left which don't help the gob's disposition. In a clinch, the sailor shoots two hard rights to the body, and a minute later clips the collegiate on the chin with a short right. It's a stiff jolt, but J. Warren shakes it off and counts three times to the mouth with a straight left. The sailor's round, nevertheless.

It's apparent to everybody that Fitzgibbons is going to keep tearing in, taking everything J. Warren's got to land once himself, and it's just as apparent that J. Warren will have to show plenty of class to box himself out of all the jams he's going to get in with the sailor in the next seven rounds. The sailor's too strong and too

good for any flashy boxing to put a cramp in his style.

Little Girl Blue reaches up to press one of J. Warren's gloved hands at the end of the round.

"You're wonderful, Warren," she says shakily.

"I'll beat him, Betty," J. Warren leans over to tell her.

No Barnaby about that pair. Thoroughbreds.

"Box him," Blowback is whispering hoarsely. "Let him wear himself out, and keep away from him."

J. Warren smiles down at Little Girl Blue and goes out to meet Fitzgibbons in mid-ring. He catches a left with his open glove and hooks with his left to the sailor's chin, shifting away from a lashing right. Again he hooks with the left as the sailor comes in, and follows it with a jab from the same hand to the mouth. Both of the sailor's arms are working like piston rods and he is making no attempt to protect himself from the stinging lefts that are raining on his face. He forces J. Warren into a clinch in a corner and pumps both left and right to the body, but he takes a stiff right uppercut as they fight apart at the bell.

Six times in the fifth the collegiate counts with his left to the mouth before the echo of the gong has died away. The sailor, bleeding from mouth and nose, plunges in, swinging with both hands. A stiff left catches J. Warren on the shoulder and throws him off balance. Before he can recover, the sailor shoots a vicious right flush to his chin. J. Warren drops to the canvas on his hands and knees, and the crowd, scenting a knock-out, sets up the blood cry of the pack. Before the waves of sound has reached the rafters, the college boy is on his feet, shaking his head uncertainly and teetering, waiting for the advancing sailor.

Fitzgibbons measures him for a right—the punch that will end the fight—and starts it. At the same instant, J. Warren snaps out of his hop. His left leaps forward to the sailor's mouth, and his right, following six inches behind it in a beautiful one-two punch, *crashes* to the sailor's chin.

I said *crashes,* and I mean *crashes.* It was a straight-eight sock that everybody in the house felt, and it left the sea-going mauler with his hands hanging loose at his side and a silly expression on his face. Before anyone realizes what has happened, J. Warren's left, curving in a beautiful hook, thuds to the sailor's chin from the other side, snaps his head back and leaves him hung on the ropes on his heels. In an instant the collegiate is on him like a panther. Fitzgibbons slumps to the floor from a murderous right as the bell ends the round.

There are four near-idiots in the arena which is as groggy as Sailor Fitzgibbons, sprawled in his corner while his handlers give him the works. I refer to the Blowback Kid, Romeo Regan, Terrence McDuff and the undersigned. Person'lly, I ain't just sure what it's all about. I know a powder puff goes to the mat from a clip on the chin and comes up an All-American socker. *You* figure it out.

As far as the fight goes, it's over now. The sailor comes up for the seventh still groggy, and he's helpless a minute later when J. Warren feints him with a left and shoots that high-power right to the head. The sailor stumbles forward, and J. Warren deliberately steps in to hold him up.

"You four-flusher," J. Warren is speaking calmly in his ear. "You haven't got the heart of a yellow cur. You cheap masher. I'm going to make you quit like the dog you are."

And Sailor Fitzgibbons, both eyes swollen nearly shut, his nose a bloody sponge and his right ear the size of a ham, quits the following round. J. Warren has cut him to ribbons.

That's that.

The Blowback Kid's still in a daze when we sit down an hour later to a midnight supper given by Little Girl Blue in honor of the new light heavyweight champeen of the Pacific Coast and points west. As far as that goes, we're all on horseback. Romeo keeps looking at J. Warren outa the corner of his eye, like he never see him before, the while he wades enthusiastically into the chow that's put in front of him. Me and Terrence flops in an attempt to make conversation, and Blowback's just there.

"I feel," says J. Warren, after we have eat our way through soup and fish, "that

there's an explanation coming to all of you—particularly to you, Blowback. Some things I can't explain to anyone, but most of it I can.

"My reason for coming to you, Blowback, was entirely selfish and, in a way, I have deceived you all the time you were working with me. I wanted to get the polish I knew would come under your handling, and I wanted to establish a reputation as a weak puncher. These things I wanted that I might beat one man—just one man in the world. I fought that man to-night and beat him, thanks to you, Blowback, you, Terrence, you, Romeo, and you, Brennan."

He turns to each of us as he speaks our names.

"I have always been able to punch. I don't believe there's a man of my weight in the game that can hit harder. It was hard to pull my punches lots of times, but it was especially hard to-night. I nearly waited too long. I wanted to kill Fitzgibbons, but I wanted more to humiliate him. I wanted to make him dog it—to show himself for what he is. He did.

"I fought my last ring battle to-night." He's talking to the Blowback Kid now. "I know this is a disappointment to you, Blowback, because I feel that you have faith in me and in my future as a professional fighter. But there is nothing else that I can do."

Here J. Warren reaches into an inside pocket and comes up with a slip of paper which he passes across to the Blowback Kid. It's a check for the amount of $5,000.

"This is poor compensation for the service you have rendered and the encouragement and loyalty you have extended," J. Warren goes on slowly. "But I want you to keep it because there is no other compensation I can offer now. My greatest wish is that some day I may be able to adequately repay you for all you have done for me. You can't understand just what that is. I can only say that you have made possible the realization of the second greatest ambition that will ever come to me in this life. My first ambition is this," and J. Warren draws Little Girl Blue to him with his good right arm.

"Our latchstring will always be hanging out for you four. Please honor us by making our home your home any time you are in San Francisco."

"And that comes from the heart," adds Little Girl Blue as she brings that sample blue handkerchief into action.

I've been in bed an hour when the Blowback Kid sneaks in.

"What," he demands peevish, "is the matter with that guy?"

"What guy?" I stalls.

"The Powder Puff," he explains. He could be heavyweight champeen of the world if he'd listen to reason. What's the matter with him?"

"If you was familiar with your Kipling," says I, "you'd know that 'the first is *Love*, and the *second* is War.' "

"Cranberries," the Blowback Kid growls.

CAJAN PETE, BAD HOMBRE

By
Ripton Croy

"'Yip! yip!' shouts Cajan Pete, 'who's the sheriff uh this yhere county?' 'Wild Joe Willet,' I says. 'An' who in 'ell is Wild Joe Willet?' he asks. 'That's me,' I says, pushin' a gun in his ribs, 'so stick 'em up, Pete!' But Cajan Pete, he busts out laughin'."

"YEP, it's shore true that women air prone tuh do the onexpected, but, for that matter, so air men. Take Cajan Pete, for instance. That hombre had more tricks in his warbag than a hound has fleas. An' thar's the woman in the calico gown."

The old frontiersman laid down the newspaper he had been reading, ran his fingers through his silvery locks reminiscently and chuckled. Since his remarks, called forth by a pertinent item he had read in the paper, seemed to give promise of more to follow, I idly stirred my julep and waited with what patience I could for him to resume.

"It happened over tuh Crooked Butte," he proceeded presently, "a long time before the boom hit that town an' turned it intuh a city. I recollect it all as cl'arly as if it was yesterday. I had just finished supper an' was standin' in front uh Hing's hash-house, pickin' my teeth with a splinter, when I seen a tall, rangy hombre, with a four-gallon hat on his head, saunterin' down the street toward me. Bein' some occupied with my teeth, I didn't pay him no attention whatever, which was shore a bad mistake, for as he passed me by he turned his head, slow an' deliberate, like he was doin' it with malice aforethought, an' spit plumb on top uh one uh my new ridin' boots.

"'Hey! yuh blankety-blank-blank,' I yells, riled. 'What in 'ell do yuh mean by spittin' on my boot?'

"He swaggered tuh a stop an' star'd me in the eye.

"'I didn't spit on yuhr boot, yuh dam' buzzard,' he says, sorter fierce.

"'Yuh're a liar,' I comes back at him.

"'Yuh're another,' says he.

"'Don't call me no liar,' I roars, gittin' mad.

"'I've already called yuh a liar,' he retorts, 'an' I yherewith do myself honor by callin' yuh another, yuh long-yeared billy-goat.'

"'No man can call me a liar an live,' I growls, reachin' for my gun an' hesitatin' when I seen he's got his hand on the butt uh his own. 'I'll carve yuhr liver out an' eat it raw, yuh white-livered coyote.'

"'Yip! yip!' he says, gittin' wild. 'Don't crowd me, stranger, I'm feelin' mean. I was sired by a b'ar an' dammed by a wolf, an' I'm a bad hombre. I'll claw yuhr guts out an' hang yuh with them. I'll bust open yuhr skull with a blow uh my fist an' feed yuhr brains tuh the buzzards. I'll—

say——' He stopped abruptly, with a sudden gleam in his eye, an' took a step toward me. 'Say, pard,' he says, sorter eager, 'is that air a bottle uh whiskey stickin' outer yuhr hip pocket?'

"'It is,' I returns, hostile. 'What about it?'

"'Pardner,' he says, with tears in his eyes, 'I'm a poor lonesome stranger in a strange, lonesome land. An' that ain't the worst uh it, pardner. I'm pinin' for a drink as I never pined for nothin' in my life, an' I ain't got the dinero tuh pay for one. Air yuh the kind uh gent that would let a poor, lonesome hombre like me suffer this-away——'

"Wal, uh course I wasn't, an' as my own throat was kinder dry we had a snifter tuhgether. In fact, hostilities havin' been brought tuh an end, we had several tuhgether an' when we got through my pint flask was empty. Wharupon my newly acquired acquaintance linked his arm through mine an' we ambled down the street, leanin' against each other, like friends uh years' standin'.

"'Pardner,' he says, 'yuh air shore a white hombre, the whitest I ever knew. I shore cotton tuh yuh strong. Yuh an' me oughter herd tuhgether, pard. We could do things, me an' yuh. Jever hear uh Cajan Pete Pohick?'

"'The stage robber an' rustler?' I says, interested. 'Shore, I've yheard uh the cow-stealin' skunk. Who ain't?'

"'Wal,' he drawls, lookin' at me hard, 'I'm Cajan Pete. I don't mind tellin' yuh, pardner, for I know yuh're a hombre tuh be trusted. Besides, I'm shore in need uh a lettle help an' I allowed yuh mought be willin' tuh lend me a hand. Yep, I'm shore Cajan Pete, pardner, an' I'm a bad hombre when I'm riled.'

"'Shake,' I says, in a friendly tone, an' we done it. 'I yheard yuh was in jail, Pete.'

"'I was in jail,' admits the outlaw, enthused by my manner. 'A posse that's been ridin' herd on me since I robbed the bank at Tyson come down on me last week while I was cleanin' out the Ora stage in Jackpine Pass. Snook up on me before I knew it, by gravy, an' clapped me in the new jail in High Hat. Tough, wasn't it? Fust time I ever seen the inside uh a jail, pardner, an' I shore found the experience humiliatin'. Yep, so humiliatin', pardner, I decided not tuh stay. So I sent word tuh my friends how I felt about it. Bein' a prominent hombre that-a-way, I shore don't lack for friends. Savvy? 'Course I ain't mentionin' no names or anything, but night before last some kind-hearted hombre sawed the bars outer my cell window an' when I clumb through I found a hoss, with a supply uh grub tied tuh the saddle, waitin' for me. It shore pays a hombre tuh keep hisself in the public eye.

"'Wal, I heaved myself intuh the saddle an' fanned the wind for a healthier climate. The hoss was a tolerable one an' made good time. He did till last night, that is. About three this mornin', just before I reached yhere, the blamed fool stepped in a prairie-dog hole an' broke his leg. Since thar wasn't nothin' else tuh do, I ups an' shoots him an' walks tuh town. An' yhere I be, a fugitive from justice, as yuh mought say, with a thousand dollars reward on my head an' nary a hoss tuh git away on. That's how I allowed yuh mought be able tuh help me, pardner. If yuh'd like tuh jine up with me, an' fill yuhr warbags with gold dust, that would shore suit me fine. If yuh got other plans, mebbe yuh'll git a hoss for me, anyway. If necessary, danged if I won't even pay yuh for it. I've tried tuh steal one, but luck's been against me. By the way,' he says, lookin' kind uh thoughtful, 'who's the sheriff uh this yhere county?'

"'Wild Joe Willet,' I says.

"'An' who in 'ell is Wild Joe Willet?' he asks.

"'That's me,' I says, pushin' the muzzle uh a six-gun in his ribs. 'Stick 'em up, Pete, an' stick 'em up pronto.'

"Wal, Cajan Pete star'd at me for a minute like he don't understand; then, as it come tuh him what'd happened, he doubled up like a jack-knife an' bellowed with laughter. Personally, the humor uh the thing, if thar was any, escaped me, but it shore seemed tuh hit Cajan Pete plumb. He laughed till his face got purple an' tears rolled down his cheeks. But he seen that

I had him, plumb-center, an', though he didn't stop laughin', he commenced tuh slowly raise his arms.

" 'Pardner,' he gasps, 'I'm danged if the joke shore ain't on me. Yep, an' a blamed good joke it is, too. Yhere I've been pow-wowin' with the sheriff, all innocent-like, an' confessed all my crimes tuh him. Sufferin' bullfrogs! I'll die a-laughin'. Haw! haw! haw!'

"An' he doubled up again in another fit uh mirth. But he didn't forgit what I'd said about his hands an' all the time kept slowly elevatin' them. Neither did he forgit tuh laugh, an' the more he laughed the more he wanted tuh laugh. Finally, he got me tuh laughin'. Anybody else would have done the same thing, for he was shore a comical sight. He rocked an' he roared; his sombrero slid down over one eye, rakish-like; each minute I expected tuh see his britches fail tuh do their duty. An' still he laughed, an' laughed, an' laughed, an' then, while his hilarity was at its highest, my six-gun suddenly flew outer my hand, I felt a whitehot pain shoot from my fingers up tuh my shoulder, an' yheard the report uh a gun. When I recovered from the shock sufficiently tuh git my b'arin's, I found myself starrin' down the barrel uh a Derringer .36, as purty a gun as yuh ever saw.

" 'Pardner,' says Cajan Pete, still mirthful, 'I'm shore a bad hombre tuh throw down a gun on onless yuh pull the trigger. I'm heeled with educated guns, I am. Yuh see this yhere Derringer? Wal, I carry it up my sleeve, attached tuh a leetle arrangement uh mine which makes it jump intuh my hand when I raise my arm up high. Most hombres who carry guns in their sleeves fixes 'em so's they'll slide intuh their hands when they lower their arms. But not me. That trick's so old it's got moss on it. Old-timers can smell it a mile off an' deal with it accordin'. Me, I train my gun tuh git busy when I *raise* my hand. An' it shore comes in plumb handy, now an' then. Hope I didn't hurt yuh much, pardner?'

" 'Not at all,' I says, truthful, holdin' out my hand for inspection. 'Yuhr bullet didn't hit me a-tall; it smashed intuh the cylinder uh my gun an' skeered it so it jumped outer my hand.'

"He let out another bellow, an' I rubbed my fingers, which were sorter numb.

" 'Wal, I'm shore glad I didn't mayhem yuh none, pardner,' he chuckles. 'Yuh're a good sorter hombre, in a way, an' yuh've shore treated me white. It would hurt me sore if I had tuh plug yuh with a bullet. Say, that's a fine-lookin' hoss standin' over thar in front uh that saloon. I wonder who it belongs tuh?'

" 'It belongs tuh me,' I says, in a voice that oughter made him take warnin'.

" 'The 'ell it does,' he says, pleased as hoss chestnuts. 'Thanks, pardner; thanks. Blamed if that ain't the very kinder hoss I been lookin' for. Much obleeged, old-timer. Yuh're shore a friend in need, which, I've yheard say, is a friend indeed. An' now, pardner, yuh'll excuse my hurry, I know. I'm plumb anxious tuh burn the wind outer Crooked Butte. I'm shore pleased tuh have met yuh, pardner. Hope I'll see yuh again some time.'

"Grinnin' amiably, he backed across the street, keepin' me covered with the Derringer. Then he leaped up on the back uh my Emily hoss, waved me good-by, an' forked it outer town, casual an' without haste.

"Wal, seein' as how I was at a kinder disadvantage, I stood thar, like an idiot, an' watched him till he was blotted out by the purple shades uh twilight; then I recovered the gun that had been shot outer my hand an' ambled over tuh my office. I wasn't in the best uh humors, neither. Yhere I'd not only let a notorious stage robber slip through my fingers, an' lost the thousand dollars reward offered for his capture, but I'd let him steal my Emily hoss from under my very nose, tuh boot. That was bad enough, Gawd knows; but it wasn't all, by a danged sight.

"The *worst* uh it was, I'd let him shoot my gun outer my hand while I had him covered. It was that that hurt, pard. I was plumb disgraced. The very thought was pizen tuh me. Cajan Pete couldn't have hurt me more if he'd poured b'ilin' pitch on me. My self-respect was gone; an' I knew that if the story ever got out,

my little day in Crooked Butte was done. I got so mad thinkin' about it, I could have et a pound uh nails with gusto.

"Uh course at fust I was for organizin' a posse an' startin' out after Cajan Pete, hell-bent. But after I'd ca'med down a lettle, I began tuh realize that sich a course would accomplish nothin'. It was dark by this time, an' I knew I had no more chance uh pickin' up Cajan Pete's trail till mornin' than a pair uh treys have uh beatin' a jack-high straight. So I eased a couple uh shots uh forty-rod intuh my system, threw myself down on the cot in my orfice tuh wait for mornin, an' a minute later was sleepin' peaceful as a baby.

"Sometime around two o'clock, accordin' tuh my not altuhgether reliable watch, I was woke up by somebody tryin' tuh knock the door down. Slippin' on my boots, I opened the door an' in popped 'Limpy' Regan, bustin' with excitement.

"Limpy was red-headed an' his legs were twisted. He kept a lettle store on the Canyon Trail, about twenty-five miles from Crooked Butte.

" 'What the 'ell do yuh want?' I growls, peeved at havin' my slumber disturbed.

" 'Sheriff,' cries Limpy hoarsely, 'yuh savvy Cajan Pete?'

" 'Shore,' I returns, on the alert. 'What about him?'

"Limpy, who looked sorter fagged out, dropped intuh a cheer.

" 'About ten o'clock tuh-night,' he says, 'as I was closin' up the store, this yhere Cajan Pete busts in the door an' sticks two six-guns in my face. Without speakin' so much as a word, he gits a rope that is part uh my stock in trade, binds an' gags me, neat an' proper, an' slides me down on the floor. Still not speakin', he then paws over my stock uh dry goods an' finally picks out a loose calico gown, a sunbonnet an' a red bandanna. Havin' rolled up his sombrero an' cached it under his belt, he ca'mly puts on the gown an' sunbonnet, an' drapes the bandanna over the lower part uh his face like female women sometimes does tuh keep their chins from gittin' sunburnt. Seein' as how he don't pay no attention tuh me, I watches him with interest, an', Sheriff, after he gits hisself rigged up, yuh can parboil me an' stew me for mutton if yuh could tell him from a woman.'

" 'What then?' I says, sharp.

" 'Then,' says Limpy, lickin' his lips, 'he looked up an' seen me watchin' him. Sheriff, I have yheard a lot uh hombres swear in my life, an' can even do a lettle uh it myself, if necessary, but the way Cajan Pete cussed me out was a caution. As fur as I could make out, he allowed that if I told anybody what he'd done, he'd come back some day, cut off my years an' make me eat 'em. Then, the thought uh my years givin' him a appetite, I reckon, he et two cans uh tomatoes an', after cussin' me out again, fanned the wind.

" 'Wal, I was layin' near tuh the winder, an' I commenced tuh wiggle towards it. I got thar just in time tuh see him turn loose a hoss which he had evidently been ridin', an' take the trail for Crooked Butte on foot. Sounds funny, but that's just what he done, s'help me. So I waited till he was outer sight, then commenced tuh worry with the rope I'm tied with. Finally, I got it loose, freed myself complete, climbed on my sorrel mare, cut a wide circle so I won't run intuh Cajan Pete, an' scattered the alkili for Crooked Butte.'

" 'An' a blamed good night's work yuh've done, too,' I says, heartily. 'But I reckon yuh must be tired out after yuhr ride an' in need uh rest, eh? How about a drink?'

" 'I don't care if I do,' he says, an' emptied the pint flask I opened for him.

" 'Wal,' I says, sorter disgusted, as I'd been figgerin' on takin' a swaller myself, 'thar ain't nothin' more yuh can do tuh-night, so yuh mought as well lay down on that cot over thar an' git some sleep. Don't worry none about Cajan Pete cuttin' off yuhr years. He'll be danged lucky if he's got any hisself when I git through with him.'

"So Limpy, bein' only too glad uh the chance, took possession uh my cot an' I set down tuh mull over the amazin' tidin's he'd brought me. Uh course it's now as plain as daylight what Cajan Pete is aimin' tuh do. Knowin' that I will pick up his trail in the mornin' an', like as not, figgerin' me as a hombre that'll follow it till thar's skatin' in 'ell, he plans tuh double back tuh

Crooked Butte on foot, in order tuh throw me off the track, pick up another hoss on the other side uh town an' ride off quietly about his business. He knew he ran small chance uh bein' discovered, even if he passed me on the trail, for his disguise was perfect, accordin' tuh Limpy, an' he knew that I or nobody else would ever look for him tuh hide hisself in a woman's clothes. It wasn't what anybody would expect a brazen devil like him tuh do.

"When daylight finally came, I slipped out uh the shack without wakin' Limpy an' headed for the corral. I didn't want the storekeeper or anybody else tuh know what I figgered on doin', for I aimed tuh take Cajan Pete single-handed. I owed him a debt, a mighty big debt, too, for one thing, an' I aimed tuh pay it with interest. Besides, I hadn't forgot about that thousand dollars reward I'd let git away from me, an' I didn't see no reason for dividin' it with somebody else when I got it.

"On reachin' the corral, I wasn't none surprised tuh find that my Emily hoss had meandered in sometime durin' the night an' was waitin' tuh be let through the bars. She had been rid' hard, I could see, but, while she didn't seem tuh be much the worse for it, I figgered she'd earned a rest. So I saddled my bay an' took the trail leadin' tuh Limpy's store, at Cleet's Corners.

"Wal, I'll never forgit that mornin', I reckon. It shore made a powerful impression on my memory. The air was sweet with the smell uh sage, tinged with sharp alkali. I felt like I wanted tuh shout, pard. My speerits were runnin' that high. I had a pa'r uh nippers in my pocket an' Cajan Pete was somewhar on the trail ahead uh me. Yep, life shore seemed sweet tuh me that mornin', pard!

"At that time, the country around Crooked Butte, for a matter uh some miles, was dense with chaparral an' juniper thickets. The Canyon Trail, which went tuh Cleet's Corners, zigzagged through the tangle like a snake. I therefore had tuh proceed with caution, for I didn't aim for Cajan Pete tuh see me before I seen him. I figgered he'd already given me enough surprises.

"About five miles out from town, I rounded a sharp bend in the trail at a gallop, an' thar, just in front uh me, beheld a rangy, loose-jointed critter, dressed in a calico gown an' a sunbonnet. True, thar wasn't any sign uh the red bandanna, but the sunbonnet was drawed in at the bottom so yuh couldn't see its wearer's face, an' I didn't let that worry me none whatever.

"The critter, who was swingin' along in the direction uh Crooked Butte, didn't take any more notice uh me than if I hadn't been thar, but kept on a-comin', like Cajan Pete natchurally would onder the circumstances, so's not tuh rouse my suspicions. That suited me all right, an', havin' figgered out what I was goin' tuh do, I primed myself for action. I didn't reach for my gun, though; I let it stay in its holster, whar it was. I wasn't takin' no more chances with Cajan Pete. Instead, I rid on natchural-like, till we were about tuh pass, then hurled myself outer the saddle, threw my arms around the critter's middle, an' pinioned his arms tuh his sides.

" 'Go slow, pard,' I says, in a mild voice, 'for I'm shore primed for death. If yuh move, I'll crush yuhr blank-blank ribs in. I got yuh this time, yuh wall-eyed polecat, an' I aim tuh keep yuh.'

"Instead uh takin' it easy, howsomever, the critter r'ared up like a mustang.

" 'Whoop!' yells the critter, in a shrill female voice. 'Lemme loose, ye shameless creature. Help! Hel-up! The baste is murtherin' me! Whoop!'

"By the great jumpin' tripe! It wasn't a man I had hold uh, it was a woman! Crucified rattlesnakes! thinks I , stumped, an' turned her loose. I couldn't have turned her loose any quicker, in fact, if she'd been a wildcat, an', truth tuh tell, she wouldn't have acted any different if she'd been one, either. I'm shore yhere tuh tell yuh that. She didn't even give me time tuh explain, for as I opened my mouth tuh do so, she tore intuh me with tooth an' claw an' like tuh ripped me tuh pieces before I could git shet uh her.

" 'Hold on, marm,' I hollers, backin' off. 'Don't be so allfired impetuous, lady. Lemme explain how——'

" 'I'll explain ye,' she shrieks, t'arin' in-

tuh me again. 'I'll explain ye for jumpin' on an onpertected female on the trail this-a-way. Take that, ye baste! An' that! Whoop! I'll t'ar ye tuh shreds, ye cowardly hywana!'

"An', by the socks uh the saints, I believe she'd have done it. She was a hard-lookin' critter, with a mean eye an' an ondershot jaw. She looked like she et snakes occasionally, just for the fun uh it. So, as I couldn't very well fight back, an' was not only gittin' the worst uh it but was gittin' it all, I turned tail an' fled down the trail.

"Did she let me go, a sadder but wiser man, tuh lick my wounds in peace? She did not. She tore down the trail behind me, breathin' blood-curdlin' threats on the back uh my neck an' every now an' then steppin' on one uh my heels.

"Wal, I'd just about made up my mind that I mought as well stop an' let her claw me up, an' git it over with, for a hombre can't hardly walk in high-heel ridin' boots, much less run in them, an' the critter shore seemed determined tuh have her revenge.

"At the very p'int uh stoppin', howsomever, I suddenly seen a narrow path curve away through the chaparral on one side uh the trail a short distance ahead uh me, an' remembered that it led tuh a water hole. Hopin' tuh lose the locoed creature in the chaparral, I spurted, plunged intuh the openin' an', would yuh believe it? almost stumbled over another critter in a calico gown an' sunbonnet, who was layin' curled up in the middle uh the path, fast asleep, an' sendin' out sounds that can only be likened tuh the broken roll uh distant thunder. The only difference between this critter an' the other one, was that this one had a red bandanna fastened tuh the lower part uh his sunbonnet so his face couldn't be seen.

"An', by the same token, I knew for shore I had at last found my prey, Cajan Pete!

"Pardner, I didn't let out a sound, though I was shore fairly bustin' with yells an' cheers. An' I didn't slow up. I just riz up in the air, graceful as a bird, an' came down on Pete like a heavenly body bustin' its way through the earth intuh 'ell.

"'Hi!' yells Cajan Pete, his eyes poppin' open. 'What the blank-blank-blank——' Then he recognized me. 'Blood an' death' he yelps. 'Yuh!'

"I slipped the cuffs on his wrists an' relieved him uh his hardware, not forgittin' the Derringer. An' he's shore well-hipped, packin' besides the .36, a brace uh .44's an' a .45. A reg'lar walkin' arsenal, wasn't he?

"'Shore, it's me, Pete,' I says, genial. 'Yuh said yuh hoped yuh'd see me again, an' I took yuh at yuhr word. Wasn't yuh expectin' me?'

"Wal, what his answer'd have been I was never tuh know, for before he could speak thar came a rush uh footsteps behind me an' the air became charged with something which I fust took tuh be lightnin'. But it wasn't.

"'Arrah!' shrieks the locoed female whom I'd done clean forgot all about. 'Ye evil-minded baste! Ye attack not wan woman, it sames; ye attack them all, ye devil. Don't let him git away, lady!' tuh Cajan Pete. 'I'm goin' tuh take off his shirt an' skin him alive. Faith, an' so I am. The onholy baste attacked me, too.'

"Sayin' which, 'spite my efforts tuh prevent her, she piled on my back an' began tuh t'ar out my ha'r an' lift my hide in general. She shore did her best tuh make things lively for me, an' she shore succeeded. I couldn't dislodge her for the life uh me.

"Cajan Pete looked sorter dazed. I reckon he was, too. He was afraid the woman was goin' tuh take off his hide when she got through with mine, I reckon. All at once, howsomever, he seemed tuh git the drift uh things, an' I seen a wild light come intuh his eyes.

"'Help!' he bellows. 'Save me, marm, for the love uh heaven! The murderer is killin' me! He is sullyin' my honor! Oh! oh! May the saints preserve an' pickle me!'

"'Patience!' bawls the woman, tryin' tuh gouge my eyes out. 'I'll slit his veins an' drink his blood if he don't let yuh go this minute.'

"'Kill him!' shrieks Cajan Pete hoarsely. 'He's a menace tuh fa'r womanhood.

T'ar him apart, limb by limb, the blankety-blankety-blankety-blank-blank-blank!'

"The hellion eased up on my kidneys, on which she'd been workin' an' star'd at him cross-eyed. I reckon she'd never yheard cussin' brought tuh sich a high p'int uh perfection. Anyway, his outburst shore brought about his distruction, for durin' the scufflin' the red bandanna had been torn away from his face, an' when she looked at him she seen the week's growth uh heavy black stubble on his chin.

" 'Mither uh Gawd,' she says, in a faint voice, an', turnin' me loose, set down on the ground. 'She's a man! Be the holy saints! I thought—I thought—she—he——'

" 'Was a woman, eh?' I growls weakly, an' rolled off Cajan Pete. 'Wal, he ain't,' I goes on, severely. 'He's one uh the meanest, pizenest cow thieves in Arizona.'

"She star'd at me with mouth agape. Then she looked at Cajan Pete, who was laborin' tuh git back the breath I'd mashed outer him.

" 'But I don't onderstand,' she protested feebly. 'If yeh had only explained——'

"I grinned. What else was thar for me tuh do?

" 'Marm,' I says, speakin' slow, for fear I'd blow up, 'I shore tried hard tuh explain awhile ago, before yuh skun my back an' tried tuh make me bald-headed, an' yuh wouldn't let me. If yuh'd admire tuh have me explain, I'll shore be proud tuh do so.'

"She tried tuh blush, but couldn't.

" 'I'd be obleeged,' she says, in a meek voice.

"So, without further delay, I done it."

The ex-sheriff paused and gave me a whimsical look. Chuckling at some thought as yet unvoiced, he picked up his glass and held it up to the light.

"An' that," he continued, still chuckling, "about winds up the story. But not quite, for after I'd recovered somewhat from the maulin' I'd got, I took Cajan Pete tuh Crooked Butte. The demon female, who claimed tuh be a squatter's daughter on her way tuh town for supplies, went along with us, meek as a kitten.

"A week or so later, Cajan Pete was sentenced tuh serve ten years in the Bristow penitentiary, for the Jackpine Pass robbery, an' I had the pleasure uh takin' him thar. All things considered, he got off powerful light, an' even then some uh the ten years were knocked off for good behavior. But the funny part uh it is, that all the time he was in prison, this alleged squatter's daughter, who had been rendered faint by the langwidge he'd indulged in when she was tryin' tuh explore my liver, paid him reg'lar visits thar! She did, for a fact. An' when Cajan Pete was turned loose, what do yuh reckon he did? He married the female maniac, settled down an' riz a family."

And the old peace officer threw back his head and roared with laughter. He concluded:

"All uh which goes tuh prove, I maintain, that yuh never can tell what a man's goin' tuh do—or a woman. Which is just as well, too, I reckon, for I sorter suspect it's the onexpectedness in folks that gives life its tang."

REFUGE THAT FAILED

By Johnston McCulley

A murderer and fugitive from the law, Henry Korl was seeking in this Northwoods country the only protection of which he knew.

AS he paddled the canoe swiftly around the bend of the forest-lined stream, Henry Korl laughed aloud, raucously, bellowing like some great beast, until the woods were filled with the echoes of it, and bird life hushed, trembling. There was a sort of nervous relief in that laughter, but no merriment. There was a peculiar quality in it that did not ring true, and it startled the forest folk.

And even as the laugh died on his lips, Henry Korl cursed himself silently for being a fool. Far to the north he was, and possibly the only white man, except one, within miles; and that man he did not fear. Yet there was no particular sense in him growing careless even now.

He told himself that his relief was so great that he had relaxed caution. That would not do at all. There were always possibilities of disaster, even in the far north where there was little to disturb the enveloping silence save the whisperings of the trees and the melodious, distant "honk-honk" of the passing brant. Some Indian might hear that wild laugh, for instance, and not understand it; might carry a wild tale down the river—and the Mounties were not fools!

Swiftly, almost silently, Henry Korl guided the canoe to the edge of the turbulent stream and into an eddy. He did not strike paddle against gunwale. He could handle a canoe as expertly and as cautiously as a native. And he had an incentive for silence.

He stopped the craft and caught hold of the overhanging green branches. From this position he could see far up and down the river, because of the great bend in it. For almost half an hour he watched the stream carefully, up and down, shading his eyes at times, blinking them at other times as though to adjust their focus. And finally he grinned, a sort of evil grin that was grotesque, beastly, anything but human.

"'S all right!" he assured himself with a growl.

Then he ate some cold food that he had with him, wolfing it down, while he rested from his labor of paddling against the rushing stream. He had only a few more miles to go, and there was no particular hurry—now. There had, for days and days, been need of terrific hurry; but now had come an

end to that. Soon, Henry Korl would reach a refuge, find his sanctuary.

"Must be a good old scout, that Daggeman!" he whispered to himself. "He'll take me in, I reckon, and send me out the other way come spring. Handy man to have around this neck o' the woods, is Daggeman!"

Getting himself into a comfortable position, Henry Korl took it easy for a time. That is to say his body rested, but his brain did not. He often wished that his brain would rest, that his memory would not bring back certain things. But it always worked, even in his sleep. Dreams tormented his sleep, nightmares of fright, fragments of memories that combined to sear his soul. Whether or not he escaped from the law, he could not escape from his own nature.

Henry Korl had been city-reared, and schooled in a modest way; then had started to earn his own living in a clerical capacity. But that was not his proper groove of life. Each vacation period he took to the woods, not in a laudable effort to get fresh air and perfect scenery, fishing and hunting, as did many others. Henry Korl took to the woods to satisfy the real cravings of his real nature—a cruel and relentless nature. He consorted with the roughest men he could find. He indulged in brutal sports. He would have an orgy of brutality and coarseness. Then he would return to the city and the clerk's job.

But the brutal side of Henry Korl increased until it dominated. When a human is half man and half beast, one or the other must conquer, for it is impossible to remain half beast and half man. And so had come Henry Korl's scheme for robbing the firm for which he worked, that scheme's failure, and his subsequent arrest. Then the jailbreak, the escape, and the life of a fugitive. Henry Korl did what many men before him had done—running from a just sentence of a few years in prison, he committed the greater crime and put himself forever in jeopardy.

Now his hands were stained with human blood. Henry Korl fled from his kind, always afraid of both substance and shadow, his days furtive, his nights things of terror when he would come from a deep, troubled sleep shrieking his fright, the vision of the gallows ever before him.

And so into the north country, the land of the Mounties. But Henry Korl did not fear the mounted policemen. He was a beast by this time, a wild animal fighting for existence against a hostile world. To him, a member of the Mounted was only another man, and all men were his foes. He had killed once, and he would kill again if such a thing proved to be necessary. A man can be hanged only once!

He grew tired of being a fugitive. He worked in the woods and tried to bury himself. But the great fear was always with him. And the Mounties picked up the trail for the officers of the States, and came after him.

They almost caught Henry Korl. They came so close to doing it that he had been compelled to empty his revolver at Constable Nevins. The constable was dead, he supposed—at least he had heard so later. And then there came to him a realization that he had indeed committed the crime unpardonable. He had shot down a Mountie! One crime that was always avenged. Every member of the force was after him now—and tradition had it that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police always get their man!

And so Henry Korl worked his way stealthily into the deep woods, always toward the north, creeping silently from night camp to night camp, afraid of meeting men white or red, always making for Daggeman's place.

He had learned of Daggeman some six months before — Daggeman, who offered sanctuary for such men as Henry Korl. Years before, this Daggeman had slain his man and had been compelled to flee, rumor had it. And in the far north woods he had created a tiny empire of his own. He had a wonderful log house, filled with furs and the trophies of the chase. He lived on the fat of the land. The Indians clung to him, for he taught them how to get more money for their fur. He was a mysterious man, a man of whom the natives were in awe.

The Mounted had not caught Daggeman. It was said that no white man ever had come

within fifty miles of his clearing without Daggeman knowing it well in advance. If a constable appeared, Daggeman was gone, and none of the Indians would talk. If it was not a constable, Daggeman welcomed the visitor in characteristic fashion and made a holiday of his coming.

A man fleeing from the law had only to reach Daggeman's place and he would be safe. Daggeman would take him in, make a companion of him for a few months, then outfit him and send him out of the woods by a secret route, guided by loyal natives. Daggeman took a delight in doing such things, aiding lawbreakers to evade the law.

Henry Korl knew all this, and now he was on his way to this sanctuary. He was not afraid of his reception, he told himself. Daggeman was only one white man, and Henry Korl felt that he could account for him if Daggeman was not disposed to do what Korl thought was the right thing.

"Only a few miles more!" Henry Korl whispered to himself in relief. "And I'll bet that here's one man who can slip up on Daggeman's place without him knowin' it. I ain't left any tracks. If he's got Indians watchin' the stream, they haven't seen me. I'll take it mighty soft at Daggeman's, and then get out of the country in the spring."

He slipped the canoe through the water once more, going against the rushing stream close to the shore. It was good to know that he was near the end of his journey, that the anxiety and suspense would soon be a thing of the past. He had been given a rough map of the route by a man once shielded by Daggeman, and he knew that eight or ten miles farther on he would sweep around a bend in the river and see the clearing and Daggeman's big log house. Rumor had it that this house was well stocked with all sorts of supplies. Daggeman sent his Indians to the nearest trading posts to exchange their furs and carry back supplies.

Henry Korl could rest after his interview with Daggeman, could sleep without the fear that he would be manacled before he awoke. Daggeman's Indians would be guarding him while they were guarding their master.

"I reckon that I've fooled Blinn, too!" Henry Korl growled. "Always gets his man, does he? Not this time! Here's where Blinn's record is smashed!"

Constable Blinn had been the close comrade of Constable Nevins, the man Henry Korl had shot while making his escape. Constable Blinn, Korl had been informed, had received permission to take the trail and keep on it until he succeeded in bringing back his man.

Constable Blinn had taken the trail for the purpose of vengeance, Henry Korl knew. Korl had not escaped him easily. As recently as four days back, Korl had been obliged to dodge Constable Blinn. And then he had taken it easier, had hidden in the forest for two days, had moved slowly. He did not want to be caught so near the place of refuge.

But he felt sure now that he had given the constable the slip. And within a short time he would be at Daggeman's place, and safe. He could laugh then at the thought of Constable Blinn. He never had seen Blinn, but he had been told that Blinn was a giant of a man, one without fear, a man who had never quit. A fugitive always shivered more when he had Blinn on his trail.

Henry Korl paddled around another bend in the stream, keeping close to the overhanging trees, making not the slightest sound with his paddle. There was no need for haste now, so he could be doubly cautious. He did not now fear the pursuit. But he wanted to be able to laugh at Daggeman and tell him that here was one man who could approach his domain without being seen. Daggeman would think that he was quite a man for that, and possibly would be a sort of boon companion.

"I'll sleep in a bed to-night!" Henry Korl told himself. "I'll have decent grub, and maybe somethin' to wash it down with. I'm fed up on this runnin' away stuff!"

A surge of relief went through him as he drove the canoe around the next bend and saw the Daggeman clearing in the distance. It was as he had been told that it would be —a long, low log house with smoke pouring from the chimney like a banner of welcome.

Undoubtedly the evening meal was being prepared, for already the shadows were

growing purple along the shore, and the dusk was coming. Daggeman little knew that he would have a guest for supper.

The clearing was quite large, and there were some small huts around the edge of it. Henry Korl could see a few Indians, a couple of native children playing around, a squaw carrying water up from the river. He tried to quiet his jumping nerves, told himself that he certainly should not break down now, with the goal in sight. Daggeman would think he was a baby if he did that.

An Indian shouted, and Henry Korl saw a man standing suddenly in the door of the big log house—a white man! Korl waved his hand by way of greeting and drove his canoe to the shore. He beached it quickly and stood up straight.

The Indians disappeared into their huts, but the white man remained standing in the doorway, puffing lazily at a pipe, leaning against the casement as though the sudden arrival of Henry Korl meant nothing to him. Korl looked to his rifle and revolver before he started up from the river. Daggeman was supposed to be the friend of every fugitive, yet it was well to be prepared for eventualities.

Henry Korl nerved himself for the meeting as he strode across the clearing. He was eager to make the correct impression on Daggeman. The man in the doorway watched his approach, but did not move. His arms were folded, and he continued to puff at his pipe. Henry Korl came to a stop six feet in front of him.

"Who are you, sir?" The demand came in a deep voice. It was the voice of a man sure of his position, used to commanding other men and being obeyed.

"I'm Korl—Henry Korl!"

"That doesn't tell me much!"

"This is Daggeman's, ain't it?"

"It is! What do you want here?"

"You ought to know," Korl said. "From all that I've heard, you give a helpin' hand to the fugitive."

"Um!" The other unfolded his arms and tamped the ashes in his pipe. "Are you a fugitive?"

"I reckon!"

"And how do I know that you are? How do I know that you are named Henry Korl? How do I know but what you're some fool Mounted Policeman trying some sort of a trick on me?"

"A Mountie? Me?" Henry Korl laughed boisterously. "Nothin' like that, Daggeman! They're after me. That's why I came here."

"Come inside and tell me about it!" the other commanded.

Henry Korl, remembering to be alert and on guard, followed him inside. He found himself in a big room amply furnished with home-made tables and chairs and chests of drawers manufactured from slabs. There seemed to be an abundance of everything. From a room in the rear came appetizing odors that pleased Henry Korl's nostrils.

"We'll have grub in a few minutes," the host announced.

"That won't make me very sad," Henry Korl replied. "I've been eatin' at all hours, and raw and cold stuff, for some days."

"I suppose so. Sit down."

Henry Korl sat down. He removed his cap and tossed it to one side; but he retained his rifle, and his revolver was ready for instant use. He wondered why the other man did not close the door. It was chilly in the big room despite the blaze in the fireplace.

The man standing near him had on a long, heavy coat and a thick cap. He had been out in the woods, Korl supposed. And he had just forgotten to close the door. Wanted to ask a few questions first, probably. As it happened, he commenced at once.

"Why are you a fugitive?"

"Well, Daggeman, it all started when I robbed the firm I worked for," Henry Korl replied. "I got three years——"

"And you have the nerve to come here, to bother me?" the big voice bellowed at him. "A common, cheap thief! Three years!"

"Wait a minute!" begged Henry Korl. "That was only the start of it. I reckon that I'm enough of a bad man for you to help, all right, if that's what is worryin' you. I broke out of jail and made a getaway, but I had to plug a fool of a guard to do it."

"That's better! What else?"

"I got over the line and was workin' in the timber camps. But the Mounties came after me. They almost got me, too. I had to shoot to get away."

"You got one of them?"

"I sure and certain did! And then I made a run for it. I'd heard about you and this place, and a friend gave me a map, so I headed for here."

"Yeh! With half the Mounties right behind you, I suppose." There was some indication of scorn in the deep voice now. "You led them right here, huh?"

"No, sir!" Henry Korl snapped. "Don't you ever think it! I protected you, and I protected myself. I took my time about comin' here and made sure that I threw them off the track. I'm no greenie in the woods! I've heard tell that no man can come here without you knowin' it. Well, I did it, didn't I?" The ring of triumph was in Henry Korl's voice.

He watched closely as the big man removed the pipe from his mouth and put it down carefully upon the end of the table. Then he sat down and looked across at Henry Korl, and smiled. There was something about the smile that Korl did not like.

"Did you?" he asked. "Last night you camped on the south side of the big bend eighteen miles down the river. You built a small fire and cooked and ate a rabbit that you'd shot. You thought that you built that fire carefully. But you always should be doubly careful in a case of that kind, Korl. Always select your fuel with great care. Last night you got a few twigs of dry cedar in the fuel, and when the fire reached them they blazed up and sent a reflection out across the river——"

"Are you the devil himself?" Henry Korl cried. "That—that was just the way of it."

"Um! This morning you crossed the river and came up along this side. You almost had an upset at the foot of the rapids. Night before last you camped a mile inland after hiding your canoe—as you thought—in the brush. Four days ago you were almost nabbed by Constable Blinn."

"I quit!" said Henry Korl. "You know it all. But how did you find out?"

"You've heard all about Daggeman, I suppose. Indian spies! How long would a Daggeman last if he didn't protect himself?"

"I'll remark that you sure do it. But what's the odds now? I'm here safe!"

"Oh, it's all right! You did better than most men who have come up the river to this place. I'm willing to give you credit for that."

"And I've dodged Constable Blinn! Always gets his man, does he? Not this time! You take care of me until spring, Daggeman! I've got a little money——"

"I don't want any of your money, Korl!"

"No offense!" Korl said, quickly. "I've heard that you always help men like me, just because you had to run for it yourself once. That's a fine thing to do, Daggeman!"

"And no compliments, please! I haven't said yet that I'd make you welcome."

"Why not?" Korl asked.

"I'm not quite sure of you, Korl. Tell me about shooting that Mounted Policeman. And don't lie!"

"I see! Doubt it, do you? Think that I'm a softie? Want to make sure that it's a regular he-man you're helpin'? All right! I don't blame you any under the circumstances. I was workin' in a loggin' camp, and this Constable Nevins got on my trail and came after me. Almost got me, too!"

"How close did he come to you?"

"He came close enough to get shot!" Henry Korl replied. "I'd seen him before in town, when he didn't know who I was. His name was Nevins, like I said. He was a pal of this Constable Blinn, I've been told."

"Yes; but about the shooting——?"

"Oh, I had to shoot him to get away! I gave him four slugs o' lead where they'd do the most good, and I reckon that I got quick results. Then I cut and ran for it as some of the other men came hurryin'. Only two saw me shoot him—Buck Crane and Jed Havers—both friends o' mine. It was just after dark. And there was a dead Mountie to be explained, and I sure didn't want to be around when other Mounties started askin' questions."

"I should think not! Then what——?"

"I just made a getaway and finally worked up here. That's all."

"Are you telling me the truth, Korl?"

"Sure am!"

"All right! The story came up the river ahead of you. But how do I know that you're Henry Korl?"

"There's no disputin' that I am. I've got my initials tattooed on my left forearm."

"If I find out later that you're not Korl——!"

"But I am, I tell you! I'm not just a common thief. I shot that man in the States—and I shot the Mountie! Not afraid of me, are you?"

"Scarcely! You've heard all about Daggeman, eh? Then you know that there is only one king here, and he is Daggeman! These natives would fight for their Daggeman at the snap of a finger! You might shoot me down, Korl, and afterward you'd not get a hundred feet from that front door!"

"Oh, I know all that!" Henry Korl replied. "But I'm on the level, Daggeman! I just want you to let me stay here safe, as you have others——"

"You shot a man in the States. And you killed a constable named Nevins!"

"I sure did!"

"And they are after you. Um! Well, you seem to qualify, Korl."

"Thanks!"

He clapped his hands, and Henry Korl started nervously and grasped his rifle in menacing clutch. A door opened, and an Indian came in.

"Supper!"

The Indian bobbed his head and disappeared, and Henry Korl allowed himself to relax again. He watched carefully as the big man stood up, picked up his pipe, and started loading it slowly from a pouch.

"All right, Korl!" he said. "Get ready for grub, if you're hungry. I reckon that you'll appreciate a good meal. And you can sleep in a real bed to-night, too."

"It'll feel good," Henry Korl said.

"Get off your coat and go wash up in the back room. You'll find a basin and water just inside the door on a bench. Guess that I'd better shut this outside door now, and put some logs in the fireplace."

The big man stalked across the room toward the open door. For a moment he stood there looking out into the gathering darkness, glancing down toward the rippling river. Henry Korl heard him shouting something to an Indian; he did not understand the language.

Korl placed his rifle against the wall and shed his coat and started to roll up the sleeves of his heavy shirt. Sanctuary at last! Safe now! Here he would live in comfort until spring, and then Daggeman would outfit him and send him forth. This once, Constable Blinn would not get his man!

His host turned back from the door after closing it and dropping a heavy bar in place. Henry Korl unbuckled his belt and dropped belt and holster and revolver on the end of a nearby bench. He stretched his arms luxuriously.

"It sure is a great relief——" Korl began.

"I suppose that it is!" came the interruption.

The voice seemed greatly changed, and Henry Korl turned with a question on his lips. His eyes bulged, and his face blanched. Strength seemed to leave him suddenly. He did not have enough of it left to reach for a weapon. Surprise had wrecked him, paralyzed him for an instant where fear would not have done so.

The big man had opened his long, heavy coat. Beneath it was the uniform of the hated Mounties!

"Up with your hands, Henry Korl!" the stern voice said. Korl saw that the other held a gun that covered his heart. "You're under arrest for the murder of Constable Nevins. I'm Constable Blinn!"

"Blinn! Blinn!" Henry Korl gasped.

"You dodged me four days ago, Korl, but I guessed that you were headed for here. So I got ahead of you and waited. I got in early this morning, Korl. Two other constables were here already. They had nabbed Daggeman."

"You—caught Daggeman——?" Korl gasped.

"Yes, we decided to come for him and take him in. He's wanted. A few law-abiding Indians convinced the natives here that they'd better take to the woods for a time. We wanted to break up this little nest for fugitives. Two other constables

have been right in the other room, listening to you——"

"You—you!" Korl shrieked. "It ain't right! You're a Mountie! It ain't legal! You never warned me—that what I said—would be used against me——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Constable Blinn. "I knew we couldn't use your confession—and we don't need to! We've got the two men who saw you shoot Nevins. All we had to do was get you. I could have got you half a dozen times, Korl. But I didn't want to shoot it out with you. I wanted to see you swing for shooting down Nevins! If I'd jumped you, you might have got me and escaped justice. Or I'd have shot you. And I wanted to see you swing! You'll have a good supper, Korl, and a good breakfast, and you can sleep in a bed to-night—and to-morrow we'll start back!"

"You—you——" Henry Korl seemed incapable of thought and speech now. He was stricken with his own helplessness.

"You're a black-hearted murderer, Korl, a born murderer—and you're going to pay for being one!" said Constable Blinn, as he snapped handcuffs on the stricken, helpless Henry Korl. "Not very difficult nabbing you, after all. A lot of fun playing that I was Daggeman, too!"

Then Constable Blinn straightened, and his voice grew stern once more.

"You shot down my comrade, and if it wasn't for my duty I'd shoot you here and now as I would a dog with rabies! But I'd rather see you swing!" Blinn added. "And here's something for you to think about, too—it's true that the Mounted always gets its man, especially if he has killed one of the Mounted!"

SCIENCE NOTES

FOUR LIBERTY MOTORS ON ONE PROPELLER

The Handley Page Hampstead, with its three engines, provides security against the failure of any one of them, but the plane as a whole is scarcely efficient because o fthe resistance of three large bodies breasting the air; namely, the central fuselage and the two outboard engine nacelles. An aerodynamically more efficient solution is the placing of the multiple engines together in the fuselage, geared to one propeller, with a mechanical system permitting the disengagement of a troublesome unit.

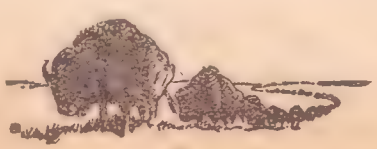
The Allison Engineering Company of Indianapolis has built such a power installation for the Army Air Service. It is described in Aviation. The transmission consists of a large rectangular cast aluminum case, carrying four driving pinions, one in each corner, grouped round a large spur gear on the propeller shaft. Each pinion is driven by a 400-horsepower Liberty motor through a sliding tooth clutch in such a manner that any engine may be thrown in or out of gear at will. The reduction in speed is from the 1,700 revolutions of the Liberty to 577 revolutions of the propeller, which in large slow planes should rotate slowly to be efficient. The transmission complete weighs only 875 pounds, yet it has stood up successfully to a fifty-hour endurance test. Every one has seen the mechanic with a piece of cotton waste in his hand, nursing the huge steam engines of an ocean liner. Now we shall have aero engine mechanics calmly working in an aerial engine room and making minor repairs on a temporarily disabled unit, while the huge plane continues to sail through the air at a hundred miles an hour!

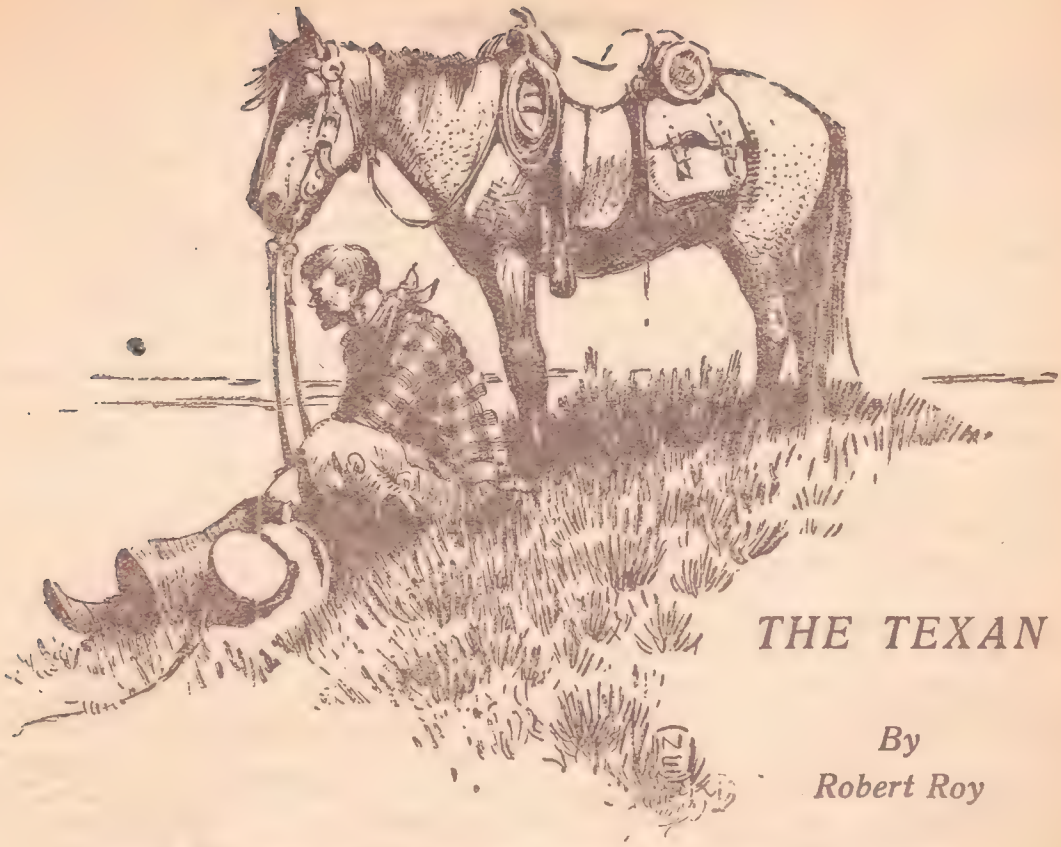
A GERMAN AIRCRAFT SHOW

At the recent Munich exposition of airplanes and seaplanes, some of the very latest and most novel types of German aircraft were shown.

The Dornier "Libelle" or "Dragonfly" is built completely of the alloy duralumin, with a 70 horsepower, seven-cylinder air-cooled motor. It can carry a pilot and a passenger with a full load of gas at a speed of 90 miles per hour. The "Libelle," contrary to usual practice, is a "tractor" flying boat, with the engine ahead of the occupants, who are thereby freed from the danger in a crash of the engine piling on top of pilot and passenger. The Dornier "Comet" is a six-passenger transport airplane, used extensively on the lines of the German Aero-Lloyd, with a comfortable and attractive looking cabin.

Not the least interesting exhibit at Munich is that of the Heinicke parachute. Unlike our own military pilots, who generally sit on a carefully folded chute, German aviators carry their parachutes on their backs. Sometimes the pilot's jump is much more hurried than the leisurely demonstration on the ground indicated in our picture. As the man clears the plane, the line still connected to the fuselage pulls the parachute out of its pack. This snaps quickly and the parachute gradually unfolds, bringing the aviator down to safety.





THE TEXAN

By
Robert Roy

A man who learned some valuable tricks during his enlistment with the famous Texas Rangers, turns a neat trick.

WHEN Buck Stetter turned his horse into the High Grass Valley of Wyoming, he experienced a sudden happy thrill. The sweep of heavy green pasture that rolled away in front of him was the very place he had dreamed of for eleven months past; the place he had sought to settle down in after years of active service down in the Panhandle.

"Look at that, Brownie," he told his horse, "just look at it. Miles of it. Wanta try some, old scout?" He climbed down quickly, threw the plaited reins and squatted on his spurs to study the long, hilly expanse before him. Buck was captivated by the sight.

When the famous old force of Texas Rangers had disbanded and its members drifted apart, Buck decided to commence work on a plan he had kept in mind for a long time—and for which he had saved some of his salary. During the last years of his service he had begun to tire of the strenuous, unrelenting work; and he envied the successful ranchers on his line of patrol who had comfortable homes of their own.

But Buck had realized that dry, sandy Texas was a hard place for the beginner with his handful of dollars that could only buy some scrub cows. Up north was the place. So, when the force broke up, after a few months of dispute at Austin, he rolled his belongings and blankets, tucked his precious, well-worn bankbook into an inner pocket and saddled up.

Through a fall, a winter and a spring, he had wandered—in northern Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, and finally into Wyoming and its wonderful High Grass Valley.

It seemed that his dream of an ideal range had been realized. At the far end of the valley, just before it took a sharp swing to the right, he caught sight of grazing cattle and straggling calves. The country up that way, he decided, must be loaded with stock.

"Well, Brownie, old boy, I guess you've gobbled enough of this here grass; we'd better be movin'." With this remark and a friendly slap on the horse's neck, he swung up and legged forward, into High Grass Valley.

Buck whistled gaily and beat a tattoo on his bat-wing chaps with the heavy quirt that hung from his wrist. What pasture for a horse—to say nothing of fat, beefy cows. It was now just a matter of hitting the main town of the valley and getting down to business with someone; surely there must be a little bit of room for one more.

He was too occupied with these happy thoughts to notice four riders till they were almost upon him; and when he did he was startled to see that all were armed with rifles besides the six-shooters they carried on their hips. Buck was unarmed; had purposely said good-by to all weapons after his discharge from the Rangers. That was his way of turning to the peaceful life—but he now felt a slight regret at his action.

Three of them—young fellows—reined in. The fourth, a man of twenty-five or so, trotted on toward him. Buck reined in. There was nothing else to do.

"Who are you?" The rider had come right up to him and stopped short. His demand was far from friendly and his sharp jaw was set with more firmness than seemed necessary to Buck.

Buck folded his arms slowly, a polite way of suggesting the fact that he was unarmed. He saw that the new arrival noted the absence of arms about his person and saddle.

"Buck Stetter; home, Texas; wanderin' up into these parts lookin' for a good place to settle down." He smiled frankly.

The other showed no signs of thawing. "Texas must be gettin' real crowded to make a man ride six hundred miles to squat." His tone was cutting, and he went on before Buck could retort:

"My name's Grey—sheriff of this county; and you're poppin' in here at a blame unhealthy time. What's more, your explanation isn't so much of a guarantee."

"What do y' mean, guarantee?" Buck asked softly. He was commencing to take offense at the aggressive mien of the other.

"That you're not one of the crowd that's tryin' to clean out the horses from this here valley, that's what!"

Buck smiled inside himself; a young sheriff and his first rustling case. He'd met them before—just after elections—and they were all alike. The three lads back of the sheriff, who were beginning to edge forward, were probably his school-day associates and admirers. None was more than nineteen years old, if that. But his knowledge couldn't help him very much. He shrugged.

"Well, whether you feel like believin' it or not, I'm an honest man and not lookin' for anybody else's cayuses."

The young sheriff seemed taken aback by the cold frankness of Buck's words, but he evidently wasn't the type to give in once he had taken a certain attitude.

"Well, maybe y're and maybe y'ain't. I'm not sayin'. But let me tell y' this: that double-rig outfit and that foreign brand ain't goin' to get y' a blamed thing in these parts. Strangers are about as welcome as the mange—after what's been goin' on these last six months. Better shift, and quick."

"Real neighborly," Buck told him.

"Was once," the sheriff nodded vigorously. "Wasn't no more peaceable and good-natured folks in the world than High Grass folks; but that bunch o' foreigners from somewhere's been walkin' over things rough-shod. Place is bein' stripped naked of good horseflesh."

Buck realized that conditions must be worse than he had at first imagined.

"Can you use any help?" he asked. "There's a particular reason why I fit into rustler round-ups." There was a calculating look in Buck's squinted eye: he was thinking of the years he had spent solving similar problems as vexed the younger man before him.

"Yeh, sounds real good," the sheriff returned with unexpected sarcasm. "Better beat it like I said—and hurry it up."

Buck could have throttled him, but there was no use in starting anything with four of them there, all armed to the teeth and out for somebody's blood.

"I'll go," he said quietly, "but I'm comin' back some day, young feller, and you're

goin' to come to me and say you're plumb sorry for the deal you've handed me to-day. So long."

Buck waved, turned his horse and cantered back the way he had come, before any of the posse had gotten rid of the open-jawed surprise that had followed Buck's statement.

Buck was boiling and he took it out for a time on Brownie's flanks until the horse commenced to pant and throw foam. No one had ever dared to speak to him the way the young would-be sheriff had done. The county must be real short-handed to pick on a whelp like him for sheriff, he told himself with a snort of anger.

Then Buck became himself. He pulled up short, dismounted and loosened the swelling and falling latigoes.

"Son, I take it all back; had no right to take it out on you for what that pup said. Gosh hang, but y're plumb soaked to the bones." After consoling the horse, Buck took himself to task for losing his temper at a youngster who couldn't know much better. Still, the son-of-a-gun had the face of a man old enough to know better. But maybe it took experience to be able to judge an honest man by seeing and talking to him. The young sheriff would learn.

Then Buck tightened up carefully that no hairs should be caked to give Brownie a sore back, mounted and started back up High Grass Valley at a walk.

At the spot where he had encountered the four riders, he climbed down and studied the broken grass that told where they had gone. The town, he knew, was straight ahead; and he needed a side of bacon and some flour pretty badly. Fortunately, the party had not gone straight back to town; their tracks showed a swing off to the west. They were probably making a detour on the chance of coming up with some of their quarry. Buck wondered how many of the gang there were. Must have been a bunch of them if the sheriff hadn't exaggerated the damage done in the valley.

But he soon found that the young sheriff had not exaggerated the rustling plague that had come over the county.

He had pulled up at a neat, well-kept ranch house to ask for water for Brownie and himself. He saw no one around—until he came abreast of the door.

"Reach high as you can, stranger, and no nonsense." Buck dropped his reins and stared into the face of a man of fifty or more who covered him with an old frontier Colt. The man was the soul of determination. Buck couldn't hide a grin as he complied with the man's order, while the other walked out of the house toward him, watching furtively.

"Great country this, mister," he said. "This is the second time this's happened to me this afternoon."

"What the devil!" The old-timer was actually ashamed when he saw that Buck was unarmed. He stuck the gun in his belt with a sudden jerk. He evidently possessed some of the old-time honor that had gradually passed out of the West as civilization came in. "Can't help it, son, there's been powerful bad times a-goin' in these parts. Man's just on pins for trouble these days. Good as cleaned cold m'self."

Buck climbed down at the other's motion, and let the horse amble willingly over to the trough beside the well near the house.

"Look here, captain," Buck said earnestly, "I heard tell somethin' about all these ructions when the last traveler stuck me up. Let's have the facts; maybe I can help some." Buck meant it and the old-timer seemed to realize the fact. But he shook his head hopelessly.

"Ain't nothin' you can do, son. Ain't nothin' any one man can do. It'll take a regiment o' cavalry to find the hounds and then a couple of 'em to clean 'em out. But I guess they'll clean *us* out first. They got me most down to bed-rock."

"You too?" Buck asked quickly, as if there was any special reason why this kindly-looking old-stager shouldn't share the general fate of the valley.

"Yep, and it's a godsend they only take horses. There's enough cows left to keep mother and me on deck. 'Course we had figured to move into a better place this winter—better for the old lady and such—but I s'pose that's all off now." He smiled faintly here. "Funny, you wouldn't think I'd been sheriff once, would y', son?"

"Don't see why not!" Buck came back with real sympathy for the other's plight. You're no spring chicken, captain, but you sure do look the part of a sheriff. Older ones than you down in the Panhandle." Buck knew that age had done a lot of harm to the old man, but his full-hearted sympathy carried him away. Yet his words had a great effect on the man.

"Think so, son?" he queried quickly. "Well, by the guns, I can say this much." He grinned happily. "My *lad's* the sheriff now, bless his young hide."

Buck almost yelled "What?" but stifled the word before it came out. This fine old fellow the father of that young hound! Impossible. But the old man was serious again; worried-looking.

"Yep, they elected him last year when I had to quit for good. 'Course I'm honest enough to own up they elected him because he's my boy, but—doggone it!—I hope the lad makes good. They picked on him at a bad time. It's all an experienced hand can do in times like this, without pickin' on a boy that ain't twenty-three. An' he's so blame head-strong, the ornery young colt!"

The man was really thinking out loud; he wasn't even looking at Buck. And Buck, for his part, just stood there and stared at the old-timer. Yes, the resemblance was there alright. Well, he'd have to pull freight pronto before the younger generation got back. He spoke:

"Well, I'm just gonna get a little drink and pull out, captain. Glad to have seen you and all that." The old man seemed startled at this breaking in on his musings.

"The devil y' say. Y're gonna stay right here for supper and bed. Think I didn't spot that foreign saddle and nag o' yours? Boy, you've come a ways—and you're not goin' any further to-night."

"But captain," Buck argued nervously, "there's no room. Where's your boy—the sheriff—gonna sleep when he gets back?"

"Oh, he don't live here, son; he's got his own place— and wife to boot—over in town." Buck sighed audibly.

"Captain, I just can't argue against hospitality like that."

"Wouldn't do y' a blame bit o' good," the elder Grey returned. Both laughed heartily, and the old man went inside to notify the nominal head of the house, while Buck caught Brownie up and led him to the big rail-corral at the side of the house.

When Buck met Sheriff Grey's mother, he mentally forgave that young man for all he had said earlier in the day. Any man who had a mother like her must have some good in him. And the meal she gave him strengthened Buck's determination to make his home in High Grass Valley.

That evening, when the two men went out on the veranda to give Ma Grey a chance to "do" the dishes, Buck settled into a home-made rocking chair while the older man loaded his pipe with great care. Contentment was in the air.

"Wonderful range this, captain," Buck observed dreamily, gazing out to where the gray was creeping into the blue.

"None better, when things are goin' right," Grey told him emphatically. "Why, when that youngster o' mine and I was handling this place, we just cleaned up proper. In fact, it gave us the little cache o' government bonds we've got hid away for later. Still . . . it's too bad we couldn't o' kept workin' 'er. But o' course the kid has to lead his own life and everything."

"How do y' mean, captain?"

"Why, I can't manage a place like this alone. There's all the hands in the world hereabouts, but it's a two-man job handling it and keepin' it in runnin'-order. Real supervision comes high, son. Foremen cost money, these days, and the percentage wouldn't pay up at all. 'Course with the kid and me it was just like partners. Well . . . what is, *is*, and there's no use kickin'."

"Aint there no one who'd go partners with y', captain—stick in a little money kind of?"

"Scarce as hen's teeth, son. All the folks around here has got their own little stake and interests."

Buck was staring into the night as if he saw something.

"Say, captain—"

"Yep."

"I was in the Texas Rangers once—ever hear of 'em?"

"Sure, what about it?"

Buck smiled in the dark that had closed in. "Oh, nothin' at all, captain, nothin' at all. Just mentioned it."

The Greys were early risers in spite of the slowed-up conditions about them, and by eight o'clock Buck was in the corral catching up Brownie and giving him a talking-to for rolling so much.

"Lord, plug, it'll take a doggone plow to get the dirt off you. Never seen the like of it. Come here now an' bite this here hunk of iron."

Buck had led his horse to the door of the ranch house where old Grey and his wife had come out to bid their guest of the night good-by.

"How's chances to ask a question, captain?"

"Pretty fair," the other replied.

"Well, how do y' get in touch with town if somebody gets sick and y' don't wanta leave them?"

"Easy. Just turn this here little crank, pick up the receiver and holler 'hello.' Can't see where the wire goes out to the road yonder unless y' walk out front there."

"Oh, I figured that was the town telegraph line out there."

"It is," the captain winked back, "but we've just kind of tapped in, like they say. Other end's in the boy's office. Pretty slick, hey, until some line-man catches us." The captain was delighted to explain his own cupidity and Buck seemed full of appreciation for the trick that was being played on the telegraph company.

"Well, so long, folks," Buck waved regretfully.

"So long, son. If y' happen to see about two hundred Circle G cayuses roamin' about free-like, just tell 'em t' come home." The little mother called her parting wish for Buck's good luck.

A few minutes after Buck left the ranch he turned in his saddle. Neither of the elderly people was in sight. With a quick twist of the reins he led Brownie at a sharp right-angle and up a long incline that sloped away toward the highest spot in the High Grass district. He had noticed that single high point the day before.

As Buck had expected, it took him until late afternoon to reach the top.

A score of yards from the summit he halted, dismounted and tied Brownie. This was the most likely place for one of the sheriff's men to be seen on the lookout, and therefore the best chance of spoiling the plan that was taking shape in his mind.

With great care and caution he crawled to the top, pulling with him the case that held small, but super-powerful field glasses. They were all that Buck had kept as a souvenir of his service in the Rangers. Having them handy made him as happy as the absence of his gun had made him glum the day before.

A full hour Buck lay flat, studying the country in all directions. The sun at times scorched the shirt on his back, but Buck never moved; he was playing for big stakes.

Not a thing was there to be seen. Evidently the sheriff and his party had taken the trip he had as their first attempt to locate the raiders. They were probably off on another scent now. Buck hoped they would not be too far off when he needed them, which he knew would be sooner or later. Buck had great confidence in his own abilities after his three terms of engagement with the Texas Rangers.

Therefore, there being no sign of the raiding gang on any hand, Buck went to work on elimination-strategy which was simply this: in what direction must they drive the horses to get them out of the district in a hurry? What were the dangerous features to such an enterprise on the south, on the east, on the west? He figured slowly and methodically, working on the assumption that he himself was the leader of the raiders, and that he had to figure out a campaign that would successfully empty High Grass Valley of horseflesh and foil pursuit for six months. Moving himself about like the big spoke of a wheel, Buck boxed the compass from southeast back to south. At due south he halted and studied long.

South was Colorado and the valley of the Green River that eventually joined with the Colorado itself. It was fairly evident that this was the easiest way of moving the horses southward; but to get to that country,

it was necessary to pass through the entire length of High Grass Valley and the town and all the people in the district. The raiders, as he had already learned, had never been there.

Therefore, figured the patient Buck, there must be a hidden pass on some sort of a direct line over these hills—and most likely a storage place where the batches of horses could be kept while a few head at a time were sneaked south. A big herd always attracted attention and questions.

Buck's work was completed except to wait for a certain time of day—just between sunset and dusk—that Buck had discovered years before was the time to detect smoke at a distance. It was just for a few moments—when it wasn't too light to glare the sight and when it wasn't too dark to catch sight of it against the sky.

That time came, and Buck took out a jack-knife. He half opened the blade, forming a right angle with it. He then drove the blade halfway into the ground and pointed the horizontal handle toward the south. He waited.

Buck's "certain time" came—and almost passed. Then he saw it. He could have shouted for joy, but instead he flattened himself behind the knife handle and aimed the end of it at the smoke while he looked along it after the manner of a sniper. He was just touching it slightly, almost ready to leave it alone, when dusk seemed to creep up over that which he had aimed at. He had his range. Taking care not to disturb the knife, he crept back to Brownie, unsaddled and picketed him. After a cold and frugal meal that Ma Grey had insisted upon his taking along, he made a bed of his chaps and saddle blanket and called it a day. Black darkness had closed in quickly.

Early morning, bright and sunny, found Buck with a page of his bankbook, making a little map. There was no longer a sign of smoke, and it seemed that the knife was pointing to a different place than he had seen the tiny wisp the night before—and that was just the reason for the knife-trick. Direction was a treacherous thing at different hours. But the knife was firm and fast in the ground and Buck trusted its aim implicitly. His map showed a bee-line and landmarks along the way to guide him. Someone was exactly where the little "X" showed on his chart. Who it was remained to be seen.

With a few happy tweedle-dums and whistles, Buck ate his morning ration and prepared to leave. There was just grub enough left to last him the day.

There was no cover along the way, just bare, open country; so Buck took the nearest thing to a dead-straight line and kept to it, consulting his map at intervals.

He traveled until the sun was almost directly overhead; then, looking back over the route he had come, Buck was startled at the distance he had covered. The rise of the ground had been too gradual to make itself felt.

But now the nature of the country was changing. The grass was drier and yellower and the cover was becoming scarcer. If the raiders had an out-post watching, he, Buck, was a doomed man.

Therefore he became wary and scanned every rock and rise that might shelter a lookout. He had the feeling of being in enemy territory.

It was while scanning the hillside to left and right and ahead that Buck discovered what appeared to be the mouth of a cave overgrown with brambles. He dismounted and investigated.

"Davey Crockett be blessed! Brownie, you old slop, come here and give a look!"

Buck got over this sensation quickly, climbed into his saddle and hurried to a place behind a large stone a score of yards away, where he got into the nearest thing to concealment possible. He had found what he was after.

The entrance was not to a cave but to a short tunnel that opened into the largest grass-grown crater that Buck had ever seen. The place near his end was fairly crammed with horses—a dozen fine ones in a corral and the rest roaming about. Buck had seen three men, but he knew there must be more. There was still the puzzle of how the big herds of horses had been driven in, but Buck gave it no thought: he'd find out all those things when darkness came. He settled himself for a long wait, keeping near

to Brownie that he might squeeze the animal's nostrils if the wind brought him the scent of that mass of horseflesh in the crater. He had long ago trained Brownie not to whinney, but Buck was taking no risks this time. Just darkness, now, and he could go to work.

It was two hours or so after midnight. There was no sound or light in the crater but the restless move of a horse and the light of a cloudy moon. Smoke no longer rose from the stone chimney of the cabin near the corral.

Then, suddenly, the blackness was pierced by a tiny light at the far end of the crater, a mile or so to the south. Another light joined it to the left, then one to the right. They grew gradually brighter, then commenced to spread and to join each other. They joined and then spread out to east and west.

The cool night air grew warm, then stuffy.

A low rumble sounded, and dark forms appeared, hurrying toward the house and the corral. Snorts and whinnies of fear came from all sides. Countless black forms were milling about. The far end of the crater was in flames and the night was choking with smoke.

A light sprang up in the window of the cabin. A door opened, casting an aisle of light that revealed an enormous herd of milling, frightened horses of all colors. The man who came out shouted. Other voices joined his.

"Range on fire! Jake! Slim! Larry! Get out of it, you hounds. Wet blankets, damn y', and speed it up. Saddles there, all of y'." Men appeared from inside the cabin and from all parts of the crater on the near end. Outposts were there, and they were coming in.

There was a great rush and jingle of hurrying spurs, a snorting of startled ponies and the cursing that had to follow: the crater was in an uproar . . .

Then the crater was still as death. Twelve of them had galloped away to the fire that was now blazing over the whole of the distant end. Only one of them remained, near the house, to guard. But his attention was held to the flare and the riders who were speeding toward it.

Maybe that was the reason he didn't see the man who crept up behind him as stealthily as a Comanche. A quick lurch and his gun was gone and his head locked in a strangle-hold from behind. He struggled. He was a big man. But the other knew ways of making his great strength useless. He was held fast.

"Sonny, this place is surrounded by every man and boy in High Grass county," was hissed into his ear as he lay on the ground, his assailant pinning him fast. "In fifteen minutes there won't be one o' your crowd alive; they'll be danglin' from that roof over there. What d'y think o' that?"

"Who the devil 're you?" the man demanded, his voice shaking.

"The sheriff o' this here county."

"Oh God," the man moaned, "they'll kill me for this."

"What d'y mean?" the captor asked quickly.

"Why, I'm the thirteenth one o' this bunch —last to join—an' they blame me for any hard luck that comes. Don't never let me ride with 'em—just guard and such-like. Wait'll they find what's happened. Oh Lord!"

"You'll hang with 'em anyway," the other told him; whereat the unlucky one burst out afresh in his appeals to heaven.

"Look here. Shut y'r trap a minute. What if I tell y' there's a chance for y' to get away when the others are strung up?"

The captive's face glowed with hope. "Oh, gosh, I'll do anythin' at all. Just say what, that's all. Oh, gosh—"

"Get up quick! Get saddled. Make a noise or try to beat it and I'll blow the top o' y'r skull off." The man handled the captive's revolver suggestively.

"I won't."

"Now beat it and hurry back to this shack. Look busy, too, or you might get drilled by one o' my men who's outside there."

The man hurried to the shack, pulling from his pocket a small piece of paper that had a map drawn on it. Turning it over, he wrote a brief note: "Horses broke out of corral. Going after them. Follow up

and give me a hand." At this point the big man appeared at the door with his horse saddled and ready.

"What now, Sheriff?"

"What's y'r name?"

"Luke," the man replied. The name was written at the bottom of the little slip of paper.

"Gotta jack-knife?" he demanded of his captive. The latter produced one, eager to please, and the knife was driven through the note into the table. "All right, come on, now!"

"You sure I'm gonna be let off?" the big man demanded anxiously. "Not framin' me like?"

"Do what y'r told and you'll get away. That's all. Now come along and help me get that string out of the corral. Circle G's, ain't they?"

"Yeah," the other replied, hurrying out. "They belong to your old man. Your name's Grey, ain't it?"

"Hurry it up," the other retorted.

When the horses were out of the corral, the captive showed the way up a natural ramp that ran up and over the edge of the crater and down the long slope to the valley. As soon as the horses started up it, the two men galloped back and punched the rest of the horses in the place after them. They followed eagerly, glad, evidently, to be away from the inferno that was getting worse every minute. A low thunder arose and then died. The crater was empty of horses except for the twelve that had carried men to the flaming end.

They rode hard, those two, through the early hours of morning—one riding for his life and the other riding not only for his life, but for the salvation of a whole district of honest horse-raisers.

One rode on either flank of the herd and toward the rear. The well-bred horses at the head were hitting direct for their home. The rest followed their lead, leaving only the matter of keeping them together for the two riders. The riders drove them furiously.

Into the south end of High Grass Valley they headed, then up toward the grounds of old man Grey's ranch. Here the rider who said he was the sheriff raised an arm.

Beat it, you! Hit due south and you'll make it. Beat it, before I put a hole in y'r dirty hide."

"Thanks, Sheriff, I'll never forget it." He lost no time in taking advantage of his opportunity. He passed from view forever.

The lone rider finished the journey himself. The sides of the valley kept the great herd together as they tore on toward the Circle G.

When the little house showed in the distance, the rider galloped forward along the side of the massed horses and passed them. They slowed down but kept on, following the way he had taken. The place, no doubt, was as welcome to them as it was to him.

At the door, the rider jumped down. "Stand still, now, Brownie, till I come out."

The door opened and Buck forced his way past old Grey, who was staring blankly out at the swarming herd that showed in the distance.

"Speed it up, captain. Call y'r boy on that wire. The raiders'll be here in no time at all. Get every man an' boy in town out here pronto!"

Old Grey had been sheriff. He asked no questions, but grabbed off the receiver and whirled the tinkling little crank. He shouted orders across and closed with, "Speed, damn it, son, or I'll lick yer like I did when y' wuz a kid." He banged up the receiver. Both men went out. Grey hurried to the corral for his horse.

"Bless my soul if there ain't those hunters o' mine!" The old man was ready to cry when he saw his thoroughbreds munching the valley grass they had not tasted in months. "How'd y' do it, son?"

"Never mind, captain, just let's beat it out to head off y'r boy." They did . . .

Smoke showed at the top of the hill down which the herd had come. It was evident that the raiders must come toward High Grass Valley or be stifled to death—even if Buck's note didn't decoy them down. In the valley—at almost the same spot where the sheriff had stopped Buck—they met a great armed and determined force of outraged citizenry; people who at last saw a chance to revenge on the outlaws.

"What the devil you doin' here?" The younger Grey demanded at sight of Buck.

"Never mind about him," the father interrupted. "Get goin', now, and circle out around that hill and ride up. Here's the chance you folks been wantin' for half a year!" He fairly shouted this, and a great cheer went up from the assemblage which turned into a kind of battle-cry as they galloped off, scattering to cover all sides of the hill. The raiders would be able to shoot down at them, but they were in the majority.

The fight was a cruel and ruthless one; but no one of the trapped outlaws could have said that he hadn't earned the quick penalty that was meted out by the long-suffering people of High Grass. The men who had lost their stock, and in many cases the bulk and most valuable asset of their property accordingly, took grim vengeance on the rustlers against whom they had so long been entirely helpless. No mercy or quarter was given; few indeed were taken as prisoners.

When the story was told, Buck's prophecy came true; the young sheriff came to him and started to apologize, but Buck stopped him short. Buck was not a gloating winner. Before he could say anything at all, however, the elder Gray had interrupted.

"Do I get it straight that you been huntin' a place t' settle in, son?" he asked.

"Right," said Buck.

"Well, let me tell y' somethin'; half of this here outfit's yours right now. You're a partner. By rights y' ought to get it all, seein' as y' brought the whole shootin' match back here."

"I'll take part o' that, captain," Buck grinned, "but I only do things on a business basis." He pulled out the little bankbook and handed it to old Grey. "My interest in the business." They shook hands. Then Buck turned to the young sheriff who stood off with a shame-faced look, and held out his hand.

"Sheriff, that kind o' makes us half-brothers." The young man took Buck's hand. He couldn't seem to say anything, but his eyes told volumes. Eventually he managed to stammer:

"By God, it's no wonder the Texas Rangers had a name like they did."

DEATH VALLEY

DEATH VALLEY, probably the most arid spot in the western hemisphere, forms part of a depression in the southeastern part of California, 35 miles long and 8 miles broad. The valley received its sinister name from the fact that in 1850 a party of gold-seekers with their families made a one-day camp in the valley and less than half of them survived, the rest of them being overcome by the heat and aridity of the place.

There is only one man who ever spent more than one day in this valley and came out of it alive. That man is H. W. Manton, of Rhyolite, California. His dismal tale of suffering appeared in the California papers. For about a week he was lost in the heart of Death Valley. Circulating helplessly around in the trackless waste he tramped 80 miles over sands so hot that he could scarcely walk on them, though shod with heavy boots. During all that time he had no food and but a single drink of water.

When he staggered up to Cub Lee's Furnace Creek Ranch, more dead than alive, his tongue was swollen to such a size that his mouth could no longer contain it. His lips and eyelids were cracked open, his clothing was in tatters, and his shoes were coated with a heavy incrustation of borax and other alkalies, which had eaten great holes in the leather. At first he could not drink. The touch of water was as fire to his parched lips and tongue. Kind-hearted ranchmen and miners forced the fluid into his mouth with a straw and then with a spoon, until he finally revived.

A FIGHTING CHANCE

By Edgar Daniel Kramer

The enmity of one man for another became the fury of a madman that endangered the lives of others with whom he had no quarrel. But Fate also took a hand in the game.

THERE was hell to pay in Solomon. While the blizzard flouted them with its fierce and angry howling, seven men tossed restlessly on their detention-house bunks in the feverish delirium of diphtheria. Dr. Somers worked over them tirelessly, and silently prayed for the much-needed serum to arrive from Nenana, which was some six hundred miles away.

Two of his patients had died, since he had mushed the thirty miles from Nome with the little that was left of the precious fluid after Nome's epidemic had been mastered. Now helplessly endeavoring to make the sick men as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, while Death leered at him mockingly from the shadows of the crowded room, he stubbornly refused to give up hope and continued to fight what his common-sense was telling him would in all likelihood be a losing battle.

"There is a fighting chance," Somers thought aloud, while the men on the bunks mumbled incessantly and tumbled themselves from side to side. "Even Martin may pull through, if the serum gets here—soon."

Although he tried to be optimistic, there was something akin to despair in his voice.

"If the serum gets——"

The door jerked inward and a gust of snow-laden wind set the suspended oil-lamp to swinging, so that the shadows suddenly came to life and began dancing along the floor and walls and ceiling like nightmare grotesques. Somers looked up from taking O'Leary's pulse to stare with hollow eyes at the man who came in stamping the ice from his seal mukluks and shaking the snow from his muffled figure much after the manner of a shaggy-coated dog.

"Hello, Nelson!" Somers greeted his visitor.

"Hello, Doc!" Nelson answered, hoarsely.

"How are things outside?"

"One heluva night, Doc," Nelson growled throatily. "Instead of lettin' up any, it's gettin' worse all th' time. It's growin' colder an' colder. Th' thermometer is just about ready to go blooey. Th' wind's blowin' hell-to-split, an' it's got an edge on it like a new-honed razor ought to have."

"Any news?" Somers queried anxiously.

"There's nobody else down, Doc, if that's what you mean."

Somers appeared relieved.

"We've planted Mack an' Farmer, Doc."

"They should not have died," Somers mumbled in his thick beard. "They were

both good men, Nelson. They were white clean through. The serum would have saved them. Any news of the serum, Nelson?"

"As to th' bugs, Doc," Nelson replied hurriedly, "if things keep goin' anyways half right, they ought to reach Solomon before mornin'. We know they got to Unalakleet O. K. Eskimo Peter was to bring them to Isaac's Point, where Sepp was waitin'. At Bluff, Helmak was to relieve Sepp an' hustle th' bugs on here. If things go accordin' to Hoyle, Doc, Helmak is on his way now. Th' storm that's kickin' up didoes sure ain't makin' things any easier for him, though."

"You boys will be having some more digging to do," Somers spoke wearily, "if the serum is not here by to-morrow noon at the latest. Martin is the worst case of the lot, and he will be the first to go."

Nelson's eyes narrowed to mere slits and his jaws came together with a sharp click, as Somers pointed to one of the lower bunks.

"They are all in a mighty bad way," Somers continued, "but Martin can not last out another day."

"Good riddance!" Nelson snarled.

Although the bad feeling that existed between these two men was a matter of common gossip, the vehement loathing in Nelson's voice caused the physician to start.

"But I want to have a hand in his croakin'!" Nelson went on as if oblivious to the doctor's presence. "That's why I trailed him up to this God-forsaken neck of th' woods. I'll get him, too, just as soon as I figure out a way to do it without puttin' my head in a noose. I ain't wantin' to be th' star performer in an air-dance for th' delectation of th' assembled populace. Nix! I ain't hankerin' for th' feel of rough hemp under my chin neither. Not that you can notice. Nothin' like that for me. It would be just my confounded luck, though, to have him turn up his toes before I hit on a way to get him an' to get him good. My fingers are worse than itchin' this minute to clutch his dirty gullet."

"You had better trot along, Nelson," Somers flung back over his shoulder, as he turned to replenish the fire. "Your chatter is not doing anybody here any good."

"When it comes to Martin," Nelson laughed without mirth, "I ain't wantin' it to."

Then he went out as abruptly as he had entered, the door closing behind him with a vicious bang.

"So that is the answer to the riddle as to why Nelson has not made good his threats against Martin," Somers mused, as he began sterilizing a hypodermic needle so that it would be ready if the serum arrived shortly. "He wants to get Martin, but in such a way that he will save his own skin. You can't blame him for that. Well, that serum had better hurry or Death will be queering Nelson's little game. The serum is Martin's only hope."

"Damn Martin!" Nelson cursed savagely, as he breasted the increasing fury of the storm. "This shapes up like th' chance I've been lookin' for. Th' bugs are Martin's only chance. Huh! Mebbe here's where I can be squarin' things."

Had he been able to sense what was going on in Nelson's hate-inflamed mind, the feeble spark of hope that lifted fitfully in the breast of Dr. Somers would have snuffed out like the light of a candle in a tornado's breath.

"You can hardly see your hand in front of your face," Sepp told Helmak, as he carried the blanketed serum into the cabin at Bluff. Seein' th' dogs is just about out of th' question. Th' smother's that thick. You've just got to let them have their heads. Th' wind's blowin' licketty-split an' th' snow's like flyin' glass. You're more than likely to have th' wind in your face all th' way. You'd better wait here a while longer."

"They're dyin' at Solomon," Helmak answered simply.

"You can't make any time," Sepp told him.

"I'll make some," Helmak replied, as he worked with his team. "Minutes may mean a lot in this business. Besides, you didn't do any waitin', Sepp."

"I wasn't buckin' th' storm you're up against."

Helmak said nothing, as he finished hitching his team.

"You're liable to go under," Sepp persisted.

"Quit your damned croakin'!" Helmak snapped, impatiently. "I'm on my way just as soon as I can start."

As it was steadily growing colder, they bundled the serum in more fur blankets before they lashed it on Helmak's sled.

"So long!" Helmak shouted, as his long whip whistled out over the backs of the team and the dogs leaped forward on the trail. "So long!"

"Good luck!" Sepp bellowed above the snarling of the wind.

Helmak barely heard him, as he steadied his on-rushing sled and quickly left Bluff behind him. With the wind catching his breath and trying to strangle him, with the cold slowly but relentlessly eating into his marrow, he pushed forward.

The going was extremely rough. He found conditions even worse than Sepp had pictured them, so he trusted absolutely to the instinct of the dogs to follow the trail. Time and time again the heavy sled overturned. Helmak grew troubled lest these continued upsets damage the serum which he was conveying, so, after floundering for three hours on his way to Solomon, he came to a stop in the lee of a low wooded hill, which shielded him somewhat from the violence of the wind.

He had just finished making the serum more safe, as he thought, when a sudden startled movement of his dogs caused him to jerk erect. A cry of alarm died on his lips, as a rifle-butt crashed down against his skull. Helmak went sprawling in the snow like a pole-axed ox.

With savage kicks Helmak's assailant sent the sled's burden tumbling beside the trail. Then he deliberately danced upon it like a whirling dervish and trampled it into a shapeless mass. Breathless from his strenuous exertions, while the dogs whined miserably, he wrapped the unconscious man in some of the retrieved fur blankets and bound him securely upon the sled.

"Mush!" Nelson shouted triumphantly to the uneasy team. "Mush, you huskies! Mush! Damn you! Mush!"

In the dreary gray arctic dawn, while the blizzard still whipped the landscape into an icy smother that mingled earth and sky, swaying drunkenly behind a sled upon which rested a bound and huddled heap weakly cursing through frost-blackened lips, Nelson staggered blindly into the midst of the cluster of snow-banked buildings that composed Solomon. He halted in front of the largest of the log structures and, after cutting the lashings, half-carried, half-dragged Helmak from the sled and into the great room, where an oil-lamp was spluttering and a knot of men were gathered around a glowing, big-bellied stove.

"It's Nelson!" Dawson exclaimed.

"An' Helmak!" Burke ejaculated, as Nelson dropped his burden on the floor.

"He's all in," Nelson croaked through cracked lips. "Tend him! An' th' dogs! Outside!"

"What's happened, Nelson?" they all chorused.

By way of an answer Nelson staggered out and slammed the door behind him, while Helmak, weak from the loss of blood from his broken skull and stiffened by the cold, clawed himself uncertainly to his feet with a prodigious effort.

"What's happened, Helmak?" they demanded as one man in bewildered wonder.

"What's happened?" Helmak queried, as he stumbled jerkily toward the door. "What's happened ain't nothin' to what's goin' to happen, when I get my hands on that damned fool Nelson!"

Then he slammed out, too.

"Has the serum come?" Somers demanded, when Nelson pushed into the detention-house, and revived hope caused his voice to tremble. "Has the——"

"Helmak's needin' you, Doc," Nelson answered with a gargoyle's grin.

"He is in?" Somers choked in his excitement. "And he down, too?"

"Not with this," Nelson replied, indicating the men on the bunks with a jerk of his gloved thumb. "He got a bad

bump on th' head an' th' cold nipped him, while I was bringin' him in."

"You?" Somers voiced his surprise.

"I mushed out to meet Helmak," Nelson explained. "I bumped into him a little less than halfway between here an' Bluff."

"And you have brought the serum?" Somers shouted his relief.

"Like hell I have!" Nelson snarled.

"What do you mean?" Somers asked, gloom again enveloping him like a cloak.

"You said Martin wouldn't last through to-day, didn't you?"

Somers nodded.

"You said he had only one chance, didn't you?"

Somers nodded again.

"You said that chance depended on th' bugs gettin' through, didn't you?"

Somers nodded a third time. What he was seeing in Nelson's wild eyes caused the words that he would utter to catch in his throat.

"So I got on th' job!" Nelson gloated. "I put Helmak to sleep with th' butt end of my rifle. Then I wrapped him in some of th' blankets that were around th' bugs an' brought him in."

"But the serum?" Somers at last found his tongue, as red rage welled up in him because of the invaluable moments that were being wasted. "Forget this silly talk, Nelson! Where is the serum?"

"Where are th' bugs?" Nelson laughed sardonically.

"Yes!" Somers snapped, leaping in front of the man to seize him roughly by the shoulders.

"Th' bugs are back there on th' trail," Nelson exulted crazily, "back there, Doc, where I trampled them to hell an' gone under my boots!"

"You have destroyed the serum?" Somers roared, shaking Nelson as a terrier shakes a rat. "You have destroyed——"

"To queer Martin's chance," Nelson told him, as he vainly tried to twist himself from the doctor's clutches. "I trampled th' damned bugs to hell an' then some."

Somers flung him away violently. Nelson spun around like a top to smash against the wall and crumple to the boards.

"To queer Martin's chance?" Somers spat down at him. "You poor blind fool, Nelson! You have queered Martin's chance all right, all right, but in doing it you have taken the only chance that O'Leary and Dunn and Black and Jenkins and Vick and Brandt had. To get Martin, Nelson, you are actually murdering six other men who never did you any harm. You have taken away their last chance, too, Nelson."

The madness suddenly fled from Nelson's eyes and an overwhelming wretchedness succeeded it.

"Lord," he breathed with an effort. "Strike me dead, Doc, but I was plumb loco! I couldn't think of anything but Martin an' th' way he cheated me! I was out to get him! Lord! Thinkin' of him drove th' others completely out of my head! I'll go through hell, Doc, to undo this thing I've done. I'll go through hell, Doc! You can cut me into little pieces, Doc, an' I won't as much as whimper! I've got it comin' to me! I wanted Martin! Ugh! Lord! I'll go through hell to undo what I've done, Doc!——"

"You can not bring back the serum you have destroyed," Somers answered without heat, for the wretched man's misery was heartrendingly real. "You can not undo what you have done, Nelson."

"I wanted Martin!" Nelson choked. "Ugh! I couldn't think of anything or of anybody but him! It looked like th' chance I've been wantin'. Lord! I'm wishin' Martin in hell, but I'd give every drop of blood in my worthless carcass, if I could be savin' O'Leary an' Dunn an' ——"

"As near as I can dope things, Nelson," Helmak mumbled thickly, as he thrust open the door and lurched inside, "your tramp through th' blizzard an' your wallopin' me on the head with your rifle-butt were just plumb hate's labor lost."

Somers and Nelson stared at the speaker with conflicting emotions in their eyes.

"You see, it was like this, Doc," Helmak went on, apparently altogether unaware of Nelson's presence. "It was gettin' colder an' colder. Th' sled kept turnin' over persistent. I was afraid of damagin' th' stuff I was carryin'."

Somers and Nelson were leaning forward taking in Helmak's words with the avidity with which a thirsty traveler drinks the waters of a cool and refreshing roadside spring.

"That bein' th' case, Doc," Helmak continued, as he clumsily unbuttoned his heavy fur-lined coat and flung it open, "I had just finished transferin' th' bugs from th' sled to my person, when Nelson put a finger in th' pie an' bumped me on th' head with his rifle-butt. Here are your bugs, Doc."

With a shout of relief Somers sprang forward and snatched the precious packages which Helmak's unsteady hands were bringing from under his coat.

"The serum is frozen!" Somers laughed like a boy just out of school, as he tore away the heavy protective wrappings with trembling fingers and brought the slender life-bringing tubes to view. "That won't harm it at all, however, and it will not take long to thaw it out."

"An' th' bugs are here in time, Doc?" Helmak queried.

"Just in time," Somers assured him.

"Thank God for that!" Nelson wheezed, as he scrambled to his feet. "Damn Martin, though!"

And while Helmak and Nelson watched him with puzzled stares, Dr. Somers, whistling under his breath, became absorbed in his preparations to snatch the stricken men of Solomon away from the bony clutches of Death.

"HE PLAYED ACCORDIN' TUH HOYLE"

A HUMOROUS BALLAD BASED ON WHAT IS SAID TO BE A TRUE INCIDENT

By Harold Hersey

Thar wuz three Old Timers o' Rawhide
A-bettin' and stackin' their chips,
With their thirty-eights a-sleepin'
In thuh holsters at their hips.

Steve tried hiz hand at bluffin',
Hawk held a king and its mate,
Butterfly Brody wuz silent,
Havin' filled an inside straight.

Jest then thar waltzed in a greenhorn,
His face like a sign "Tuh Let" . . .
"He'z thuh kind," Old Red Eye whispered,
"Uv a man that men ferget."

Butterfly gathered hiz winnin's,
Hummin' away at a tune,
Rollin' hiz quid then a-aimin'
And hittin' a big spittoon.

Thuh greenhorn shuffles up awkward
Askin' tuh play in thuh game . . .
Butterfly shifts hiz terbaccer
A-holdin' back on hiz aim:

"Yuh're welcome tuh jine us, Stranger,
"Pervidin' yuh plays on thuh square,
"If yuh don't . . ." but thuh greenhorn nodded
And smiled as he drew up hiz chair.

He could sartainly riffle thuh pasteboards
With a smile that wuz froze on hiz lips,
Raisin' thuh ante and bettin'
And easin' 'em out of their chips.

Butterfly's face wuz a study
Fer thuh stranger wuz goin' amuck,
Dealin' thuh cyards with a flourish
And runnin' a paystreak o' luck.

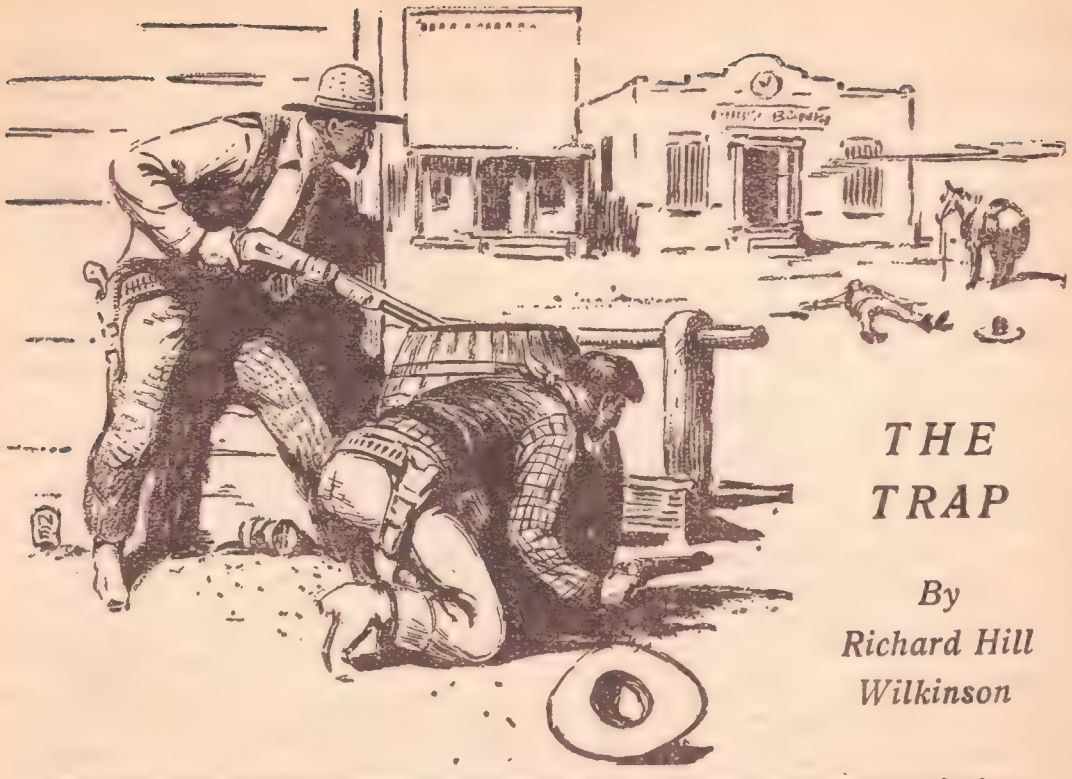
Then Stevie he riz on hiz uppers:
"Stranger, yuh're playin' 'em sharp,
"Go slow on yore quick-fingered dealin'
"Or else yuh'll be playin' a harp.

"We deals 'em accordin' tuh Hoyle
"And I'm honin' in fer a row
"Onless yuh're anxious tuh jine
"The ones up in Boothill now.

"We don't like thuh way yuh been dealin',
"Me and muh two old pards,
"Nor yore manner o' raisin' thuh ante
"After yuh riffle thuh cyards."

Thuh greenhorn's eyes give a flicker
Like frost that has passed over steel:
"Gentlemen, I may be a stranger,
"But my word is as good as my deal."

"Wall! . . . What iz thuh name that yuh go by?"
Drawls Butterfly ready tuh boil . . .
"My friends," sez thuh stranger embarrassed,
"*I am the man named Hoyle.*"



THE TRAP

By Richard Hill Wilkinson

Jed Anderson had felt the force of Pete Fergason's Colt .45 once and it made him hanker to "get" that badman—and get him right.

A MAN strode through the open door of the Coyote City Savings Bank and walked leisurely toward the teller's window. Jed Anderson, the cashier, who was counting out the day's receipts in preparation of closing, did not glance up at the sound of footsteps. Unconsciously he was aware of another presence in the room, but it made no impression upon his busy brain.

The stranger stopped before the window and spoke in a slow, even voice:

"Got an order I want cashed—*pronto.*"

Jed continued to count the money without glancing up. It was far past closing time and he didn't intend to be bothered with late callers. Finishing one bundle of bills he made a brief tally on a slip of paper and reached for another. But his hand froze on the package and his face went white beneath its thin coat of tan.

Something was pressing against his forehead. Something round and cold as ice. Jed didn't have to be told what that something was. He had felt the business end of a Colt .45 before.

The stranger was speaking again:

"Jest push them bundles o' greenbacks over this way, mister, an' then mosey over to th' safe an' fetch me th' rest." The man spoke as if he was ordering a plug of tobacco or a drink of whiskey down at the Paradise saloon.

Jed looked up slowly. The muzzle of the .45 slipped down and rested on the bridge of his nose. With bulging eyes he stared at the man on the opposite side of the window.

"Pete Fergason!" he breathed. "By all that's holy! Thought he was dead!"

Even though Jed was new to the job he could not mistake the desperado. Upon his arrival, a month ago, he had been warned against the bandit; had had vivid pictures painted of his vile deeds and daring robberies. But one thing troubled Jed. Always, the townfolks said, when Pete made a cleanup, he was accompanied by a band of followers. There were about a dozen in all, and their reputation for law-breaking and unmerciful treatment of victims, was known far and wide.

Now, apparently, the outlaw chief was alone. The room was unoccupied save for

the two men. Humm, thought Jed to himself, alone and a very serviceable .45 resting in the safe near that pile of bills. Only a man new to the job would have entertained the course of action that ran through the cashier's mind.

With a plainly frightened face and trembling hand, he pushed the currency toward the bandit and turned toward the safe. The outlaw sneered and stuck his gun through the iron grating.

"Snap to, feller. Can't take all night on this job."

Jed hurried his steps and began fumbling with the combination of the safe. His fingers were clumsy and seemed to slip over the knob in a most exasperating way. A sharp click came from behind, as the bandit cocked his weapon.

Jed spun the knob, hesitated on the third turn and reversed it twice. Perspiration was pouring down his face. Would he dare attempt the rash act that was in his mind? With a final twist he swung open the heavy door and glanced inside. Yes; there was the gun, in the same place that he had left it a month previous.

The cashier reached inside and drew out a bundle of bills. These he placed carefully on the floor and again stretched his arm within the safe. His fingers closed over the cold handle of the .45. A sudden surge of courage, born of desperation, came to him. His lips set in a thin, straight line, his limbs ceased to tremble.

In one quick movement he had stepped back, and swung partly around, the six-gun clasped firmly in his hand.

But Jed Anderson never pulled the trigger of that gun; never got far enough around even to get a good look at the bandit. A deafening report came from the direction of the window and the heavy slug from a .45 ploughed its way into the shoulder of the new cashier. There was no pain. It seemed as if his shoulder had suddenly gone numb. With blurred sight he saw the bandit leap over the iron caging and drop lightly inside; saw other men pour in through the door; heard vague shouts from without and hurrying footsteps. Then he slumped to the floor, into an abyss of blackness and nothingness.

The smoke had not yet ceased to pour from Pete Fergason's .45 when he leaped over the iron grating and started for the safe.

"Guard my back, boys," he yelled without turning around, as he heard the sound of men entering the bank.

A dozen masked men had crowded into the bank at the sound of the shot. Now they distributed themselves about at the different windows and doors with drawn six-guns. The streets had suddenly become alive with people, shouting and running toward the bank. The cry of: "Fergason's in town!" filled the air. Spurts of flame began to shoot from the bank windows. A shriek of pain arose as one of the bandit's bullets found its mark. As quickly as it was filled, the street became empty. Men disappeared into buildings, behind boxes and some even took refuge behind the large posts of the hitch-rack in front of the Paradise saloon, where they could get a better view of the bank.

All were waiting for the bandits to appear with their loot. No answering shots were fired to the constant popping of the raiders.

The crowd did not have long to wait. Fergason had already nearly filled a sack with currency and had joined his followers in the outer room of the bank.

"Where's th' hosses?" he asked curtly of one of the men.

"Out back, as you ordered," was the reply. "We can make a break for it through that back window. The hull town's on th' front side where there's plenty o' shelter. They won't be able tuh git a shot at us till we're mounted an' got a good start."

Fergason nodded and, swinging the sack over his shoulder, walked over to the window indicated. Outside was the bare desert, stretching away as far as the eye could reach. To the right, and huddled close to the building, were the horses.

The outlaw chief grinned to himself. "Another job done an' it looks like a neat getaway," he mumbled as he stepped through the window.

Thirteen mounted men suddenly dashed out from the rear of the bank, and at their head, riding a large black horse, was Pete

Fergason, an evil grin on his ugly face. As they raced out into the desert, the bandits turned in their saddles and ripped shot after shot into the astonished crowd. The townfolks returned the fire, but their shots went wild. Once more Pete Fergason and his followers had made a successful raid upon the little bank in Coyote City.

No attempt was made to follow the raiders. It had been tried before without success. The outlaws, mounted on fast horses, would make for the hills, where, it was said, they had a rendezvous known only to themselves.

When Jed Anderson opened his eyes he was lying on an improvised bunk in the little back room of the bank. He was partly undressed and his shoulder was swathed in bandages. As he slowly regained his senses, he became conscious of a dull throbbing pain where the bullet from Pete Fergason's gun had penetrated almost to the bone.

A group of men were gathered near the door, engaged in low conversation. Shortly Jed began to catch snatches of what they were saying and recognized the deep, base voice of Sam Stowell, the sheriff.

"I tell yuh we've got tuh set a trap fer th' varmints," boomed the sheriff. "Ain't no tellin' where they'll strike or when. Las' week they held up the bank at Sanborn an' got away with fifty thousand dollars in cold cash. Somethin' got tuh be did mighty quick or Fergason'll be robbin' th' gold outter our teeth. After his las' job th' report came in thet th' varmint wuz daid. What did it amount tuh? Nothin'!" The sheriff snapped his fingers to emphasize this statement.

"Humm, peers tuh me th' arm o' th' law otter be on his job when he's mostly needed, 'stead o' shootin' pool over at th' Paradise," spoke up Clem Harris, one of the bank directors.

Others nodded their heads but remained silent. This was no time for bantering. There was business at hand—business of the most urgent sort; namely, to capture, dead or alive, one Pete Fergason, bandit, murderer, and thief. How? That was the question before the house. The men, grim-faced and silent, looked at each other, expectantly, hopeful. The sheriff had stated the problem as it now stood, to be sure, but as yet no one had mentioned a solution.

Suddenly the men whirled at the sound of a weak, almost indistinct voice. Jed Anderson had raised himself up on an elbow and was calling feebly.

The sheriff approached and bent over the white face.

"Whiskey," murmured Jed.

A moment later, revived with the strong stimulant, Jed propped himself up with several pillows and began to talk.

"Gents," he began, "I ain't bin in this here town very long an' I don't know anything about this here Pete Fergason only what I've heard an' seen to-day. As yuh gents already know he ain't th' kind o' feller what makes one big clean-up an' then lights outter th' country. No, sir. If he hears of another big chance he's a-comin' right back with his gang o' dirty thieves an' do it all over again. Now listen." For a full hour the bank cashier talked on. Outlining his plan in minute detail. Occasionally the listeners nodded in agreement or made some sign of approval.

When he had finished, Jed lay back on the bunk all but exhausted, but his face shone with the enthusiasm of his bright idea.

The men rose and slapped each other on the back. What a simple plan. Why hadn't they thought of it before! These and other similar expressions were passed among them. Satisfied that the days of Pete Fergason, the bandit, were drawing to a close, they filed out of the building.

Two weeks later, the news leaked out that a certain mining company had deposited a large sum of money at the Coyote City Savings Bank, to be held until called for. It was on Monday morning that the foreman of the X L cattle ranch brought the message to the Paradise saloon. He had been at the bank when Jed Anderson had received the gold, and had overheard the cashier's conversation with Mike Smalley, the owner of the Lost Hope Mine.

"Yeah," replied the foreman to the questioning townfolks, "Mike drove down in a truck from the mine. Nigh ontuh a dozen sackfuls o' th' stuff. Hired a couple o' two-gun hombres tuh come along an' keep an' eye out fer Fergason an' his gang."

"Smalley's a fool to leave th' money at *that* bank," spoke up someone. "Might jest as well lay it out on th' street till Pete gits ready tuh come along an' pick it up."

At this a titter went up, but for the most part the men were sober and worried. Sheriff Stowell, who had overheard the X L foreman's loud conversation, rose from his position at a card game, and slipped quietly out into the street. Once outside he turned his steps toward the bank. Jed Anderson met him at the door with a broad grin.

"Well?" he asked when the sheriff had followed him inside and the two stood staring out of the front window.

"It's done," replied Stowell. "That X L foreman shore knows how to start gossip. Now how long do yuh reckon it'll be afore Fergason hears about it?"

"Not s'long as yuh might think," declared Jed suddenly after a short pause, and pointing through the small window. "Look there!"

The sheriff glanced in the direction indicated and his hand involuntarily dropped to the .45 at his hip. A man had just made a hurried exit from the saloon, swung hastily to the back of a waiting pinto and was galloping down the main street of the town at a furious pace. An instant later the X L foreman, followed by the remaining occupants of the saloon, dashed into the street and poured a red-hot fire after the fleeing man. Some mounted the horses tied to the hitch-rack and gave chase, but the majority hung back, as if reluctant to follow.

The sheriff looked at the bank cashier and winked.

"Gotta go out there and make a bluff at followin' that feller," he grinned as he made for the door.

The instant the sheriff made his appearance on the street, a half score of men crowded about him, all trying to talk at the same time. Stowell singled out the X L foreman and walked away, calling over his shoulder at the crowd, "saddle up an' git ready fer a ride."

"What's it all about, Jim?" asked the sheriff when the two were out of earshot.

"After I gits through spinnin' my yarn about all that gold, an' a couple o' th' other boys puts in a word or two, this hombre what yuh jest seen leave so almighty sudden, comes up tuh me an' says: 'How much gold'd yuh say wuz in them bags, partner?' Right away I smells a rat an' I knows that some o' th' other boys does too. There ain't nothin' left tu do but play th' part, so I begins tuh act suspicious right away. 'What's it tuh yuh?' I asks. 'Mebbyso yu'd like tuh git yore mitts on some o' it, eh?' At this he gits mad an' goes fer his gun. So does I. But instead o' yankin' out his gat as I expects, he busts me one in th' eye, an' then beats it like all git-out fer th' door."

"Humm," mused the sheriff. "That's that. Now we gotta give this feller a run fer his money. But remember—*don't catch him.*"

The two hurried back to the waiting crowd and a few short minutes later, the sheriff, with a large posse at his back, was tearing out toward the desert on the trail of Pete Fergason's spy.

At dusk they returned, hot, dusty, tired, and without as much as a fleeting glimpse of the outlaw. Stowell at once hurried to Jed Anderson and reported the result of the chase.

"Lost all track o' him at th' beginnin' o' the foothills," the sheriff began when the two were comfortably seated in Jed's cosey cabin, "but I'm thinkin' when Fergason makes his raid he'll be comin' in by th' North trail. We'll keep a heavy guard posted in that direction fer th' next week anyhow."

Jed nodded in agreement.

It was three days later that the guard, posted on the North trail, came galloping into town and brought his big bay to a frothing stop in front of the Paradise saloon. Sheriff Stowell was playing pool when the messenger entered and beckoned him to one side.

"He's acomin'," breathed the man in the sheriff's ear. "Him an' his whole gang, down th' North trail an' ridin' like all git-out."

Stowell's face was grim and determined as he moved about the saloon, stopping here and there to nod to a card player or to whisper a few words to the idlers. Next

he hurried to the bank to exchange a few words with Anderson.

"All set?" he asked of the cashier.

"All set," came the reply, though a little shakily.

"Remember," warned the sheriff, "it's up to yuh to start th' fireworks—*and git Fergason.*"

Immediately when Jed saw the broad back of the sheriff disappear through the door, he became conscious of a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. He was alone and Fergason and his gang were coming! The thought sent a chill to his heart. In one brief moment he recalled that other day, nearly a month ago, when a slug from the bandit's .45 had ripped its way into his shoulder. Jed felt his courage slipping. Would he have the nerve to carry out that plan that he had so bravely agreed to a month ago?

Outside a horseman had drawn rein in front of the bank and was dismounting from his big black. The cashier's hand trembled as he bent to his work. The man entered, and approached the window with slow, dragging steps, his spurs clinking music on the hard floor. The footsteps came to halt and Jed glanced up.

Pete Fergason stood, the blue barrel of his six-gun resting on the window-sill, the same ugly, sneering grin on his evil-looking face.

"Reckon yuh know what I'm after, partner," snapped out the bandit. "An' don't try any funny business, 'cause I won't be aimin' at yore *shoulder* this time."

Jed stared, white-faced, wide-eyed. "How did you know?" he managed to ask in a quavering voice.

The outlaw sneered. "Huh. Nemmine how I know. Fetch out that gold an' be right quick about it!"

With faltering steps Jed moved toward the safe. He was stalling for time and trying to arouse his courage to the point where he could face the bandit with a steady hand. It would never do to back down now.

Both of the heavy safe doors had been closed and locked purposely when the sheriff brought word of Fergason's coming. This fact gave the cashier a few moments in which to go over the plan of action that had been uppermost in his mind for the past month.

By the time the outer door had swung outward, Jed had forgotten the .45 that menaced his back. His only thought was to open that other door and—

A dull click and it swung away. Jed reached inside with both hands. With his left he grabbed the top of a sack that was supposed to contain the gold from the Lost Hope. With his right he took a firm hold on the .45, that was resting in its usual place, bringing it up, out of sight, on the under side of the sack. In this manner he strode over to the waiting bandit. Fergason laid down his gun and reached beneath the iron grating.

Jed's chance had come. In one movement he dropped the sack and yanked back the hammer of the six-gun.

"Claw the air, Fergason, an' no tricks."

The outlaw's eyes bulged. Slowly his hands rose above his head as he felt the jab of the .45 in his stomach. Then he sneered.

"Yuh fool," he muttered with an oath. "Don't cha know that my men'll be in any minit an' shoot yuh down like a dog?"

"Mebbyso," rasped Jed as he secured the outlaw's gun. "Mebbyso, but don't be so cock sure o' yoreself, Pete Fergason. Keep them hands up *high.*"

A shout came from outside, followed by another and then a few scattered shots. Jed glanced through the window. Men were appearing from everywhere, firing as they came. A small group had gathered behind a pile of boxes near the Paradise. These men were Fergason's men. Surprised at the non-appearance of their leader, they had ventured toward the bank. A volley of shots had greeted them, coming from every building in the town. The pile of boxes, though a poor shelter, was the only one offered and it was behind these that the bandits were making the last stand.

Sheriff Stowell, with fifteen chosen men, was pouring a deadly fire into the slim barricade from across the street. Another group was stealing around the Paradise to attack from the rear.

These things Jed saw in one glance. But what he did not see was a man detach himself from the group of bandits, and dart,

under cover of a rubbish pile, toward the bank.

He turned back to his prisoner. The outlaw chief seemed oblivious of the battle without. He calmly rolled a cigarette and regarded his captor sneeringly. Jed approached, dangling a pair of handcuffs that the sheriff had given him a half hour before.

Suddenly a deafening report sounded in the cashier's ears. He felt a searing pain along his neck. Blood dripped down on his hand and splashed into his face.

With one look at the fallen man, Pete Fergason turned and made for the door. The firing near the Paradise was growing in volume. Sheriff Stowell and his men were closing in on the bandits.

With a single leap the bandit chief left the steps and landed on the back of his big black. In another moment he was racing toward the desert.

Jed Anderson, his first wave of dizziness past, raised himself up on an elbow in time to see the outlaw disappear through the door. With a mighty effort he got to his knees and for a moment remained thus, swaying to and fro like one in a stupor. Then, as if suddenly realizing that the object of his carefully planned trap was slipping through his fingers, he began to crawl toward the back window, slowly, painfully.

Pete Fergason swept by the corner of the bank and headed directly for the low range of hills that were faintly visible to the northward. No volley of shots flew after his departing figure. His capture was placed in the hands of Jed Anderson, and it was to him that the townfolks would turn for an explanation afterward.

Fifty, seventy-five, one hundred yards the big black covered with remarkable speed. Then, from the back window, the same through which the bandit had made his escape a month ago, a single shot crashed after the fleeing man. The outlaw straightened in his saddle, swayed backward and tumbled to the dust, clearing the flying hoofs by a miracle.

"Yep," Sheriff Stowell was saying when Jed Anderson returned to consciousness. "It shore wuz a plucky thing tuh do. The slug from that outlaw's gun tore part of his neck away, an' then he crawled over tuh th' winder an' dropped Pete at a hundred yards. I got the other feller when he wuz tryin' tuh mount his hoss.

"Reckon that idee o' Jed's wuz sure a good un."

INDIAN "MIRACLE MEN" IN MEXICO

Heedless of the fact that they might never be able to return to the United States, a stream of sick and crippled Mexicans recently passed across the border at Laredo bound for a dismal cemetery in Nuevo Laredo, where a motley throng estimated at more than 6,000 awaited their turn to pass before two Indian "miracle men."

Just outside the walls of the cemetery, the two healers, middle-aged men, worn to skeleton appearance by three days and nights of almost ceaseless prayer, carried on in a fever of religious zeal. Clad only in shirts and trousers, they laid their hands upon each passing supplicant and invoked the blessing of "Almighty God."

The "miracle men" were Yucatecas Indians, who walked into Nuevo Laredo unannounced, set up camp with their two women in the cemetery, and began their weird services. Soon a crowd formed, whole Mexican families flocking to the scene and setting up camp to await an audience with the Indians.

Numerous miraculous cures in the cases of paralytics, the blind and deaf, were reported, and each report added to the size of the throng. San Antonio, more than 200 miles distant, has contributed a large share of the pilgrims.

The Indians refused to accept pay for their services. They pray to the Christian God and ask whether the sick person believed in God and the power of Divine healing.

AN OLD DOG'S NEW TRICK

By George A. Wright

"Tricks is tricks," and the sheriff got caught. But the sheriff's deputy was also tricky.

SHERIFF WALKER, swinging his heavy keys, came out of the cell-block whistling—and his change of mood was so noticeable that Deputy Anson Williams looked up in amazement.

"Why th' music, Jerry?" he laughed.

"Pete Cady's squawked," the long, lean old leather-faced sheriff grinned. "Tol' me all about th' stage holdup—an' better yet, jus' where to go to find Bill Tindle, his partner."

"Th' divil you say!" the little under-sheriff returned, all attention. Such a statement was indeed amazing.

"Yep. Tol' me how him an' Bill planned th' thing, an' all about how they pulled it. Says him an' Tindle did it alone—an' that they didn't have any help—like we'd been thinkin'. Claims they 'planted' a coupla guns, jus' to make it look like a four-man job. Stuck th' barrels out between some rocks, so it would look to th' stage driver like two more bandits had th' stage covered. That's why Brown claimed he was held up by four men."

The sheriff paused and the deputy watched him closely for a full minute. Finally he spoke. "That part of it may be all right—th' truth, I mean—but, Jerry, there's something wrong somewhere. I'm nigh onta fifty years old, an' I've knowed Pete Cady ever since he was knee-high to a prairie dog. An' Cady ain't squealin' on no pardner less'n he's got a heluva good reason for doin' so. Pete ain't never been no stool-pigeon, an' he ain't startin' now. *When an old dog starts doin' new tricks, Sheriff, is th' time to start watchin' him.*"

Sheriff Walker laughed at his deputy's expressed fears. "They'll all squeal—when you get 'em cornered," he said. "I've got Cady cold, an' he knows it. Got him with his half of th' loot, didn't I? I've been talkin' to him, is all. Showed him how if he'd tell me who helped him do th' job, that th' judge wouldn't be quite so hard on him. I told him that I'd see he got forty years, if he didn't—an' that fetched him. It's all knowin' how to handle such guys, Ans," the old sheriff boasted.

But Anson Williams wasn't satisfied. He had been connected with law enforcement longer than the sheriff, and he knew that Pete Cady was no squealer. Likewise, he had but little respect for anything a stool-pigeon ever told them. He considered their word about useless. He said as much to the sheriff.

"You're wrong, in this case at least, Anson. Why, he's even told me where to go to find Tindle! Says I'll find him holed

up in an under-ground dugout that they've got, at the foot of th' Eastern trail leadin' up Six-Point Mountain. Tol' me jus' how to go to get there, an' where to hide—down by a small spring—until Tindle comes out after water. I can tell when a man's a-lyin' an' when he ain't. Anyhow, it's worth tryin'. I'm ridin' straight out there—right to-day an' if I come back with Bill Tindle you'll hafta admit that I'm right, won't you?"

"Mabbe so, an' mabbe no," the deputy replied. "Pete Cady ain't no snitch, an' even if you do find this Tindle, I'll still think there's a nigger in th' woodpile. When old dogs start in doin' new tricks, you wanta watch 'em."

Sheriff Walker laughed at his deputy's suspicions, went out, saddled his horse and rode away. "I'll show him," he muttered, thoroughly satisfied with the world in general.

The trail to the foot of Six-Point Mountain was but a half-day's ride over a stretch of sandy wasteland, sagebrush covered, and the sheriff let his horse take its time. There was no great rush, for Tindle would not leave his hiding place and come out after water until nearly dark. Thus Walker reasoned, and he was right, for it was in that half hour that precedes desert dusk when the outlaw made his appearance.

The sheriff saw his man—from his hiding place—when Tindle first stepped from the mouth of the hidden cave. He made no motion to stop him, but let him go to the spring, drink his fill and load up his canteens. Then, when the bandit arose, Sheriff Walker threw down on him, stepped out and commanded him to surrender.

Taken by surprise, there was nothing else the fellow could do. Up went his hands in compliance with the sheriff's orders. And five minutes later, shackled to his own mount, Bill Tindle rode at the sheriffs side on his way back to town.

"How'd you come to find me?" he growled. The sheriff laughed heartily.

"Cady tol' me," he replied. And although he insisted that Pete had snitched, still Tindle would not believe it. He thought the sheriff was kidding him.

Finally, however, after the officer had repeated almost word for word the partner's story, Tindle began to accept it.

"Th' dirty, snitchin' belly-whacker!" he growled. "Wait till I meet him!"

And such a meeting! Hardly had the big iron doors closed on Tindle than he leaped for Cady's throat. "Snitch on me, willya?" Tindle cried with wrath. "I'll fix you!"

Sheriff Walker chuckled to himself as he locked the massive door and strutted back through the corridors headed for the jail office. "Let 'em kill one another," he muttered, knowing all the time that they wouldn't, couldn't. "They'll bloody up th' cell-block a bit, an' then get together," he predicted. "I thought some of lockin' 'em in separate cells, but they'll hafta fight it out sometime or others, so why not now?"

Deputy Williams nodded his head in agreement. In fact, he was so much taken back by the sheriff's success that he could not well do other than agree with him. But at that, he still remained skeptical, and made up his mind to watch things most closely.

The following morning, when Sheriff Walker went in to take breakfast to his prisoners, he found them setting together on one bunk, smoking, and as sociable as any two thieves you ever heard tell of in all your life.

"Jus' as I predicted," old Jerry thought to himself. Aloud he said: "Chow time, boys. Glad you've made up. That's th' best way. It's six weeks until we can try you, so you might as well get along together. You're both equally guilty, I guess, an' it wouldn't be fair for one man to take all the punishment."

Bill Tindle looked up at the long, lantern-jawed old officer and grinned. "That's what we've decided, Sheriff," he said. "I was pritty hot last night, but we talked it over, after we scrapped for a while, an' made up our mind that yo're right. Yep, we're both equally guilty, an' we'll tell th' judge so when th' time comes."

"That's th' proper attitude, Bill. I tol' Cady you'd feel that way—once you got

time to think things over. Now, can I do anything for you boys?"

"You can," Cady stated. "You can send Deputy Williams up to Far Peak an' have him get a suitcase that Big Tom Donovan is keepin'. Tell him to tell Donovan that it is for Bill. He left it there, an' Bill's share of the loot is locked up in it. We've made up our mind to return th' money an' ask th' judge to be easy on us."

"Fine!" the sheriff chuckled. "Ans ain't doin' a thing to-day, so I'll start him right out after it. He can make it up there by night, get th' money an' come back to-morrow. Glad you tol' me. That'll wind up this case an' make it better for you fellers."

Supper time. Nearly dark. Sheriff Walker approached the cell-block door with a big trayful of food. He would treat the boys to a big feed, he had decided, to show them that he appreciated their confessions. He placed the tray of food on a table, unlocked the big door, kicked it open, picked up the food and entered.

Neither prisoner was in sight. "Prob'ly asleep in their cells," he thought.

"Come an' get it! Grub pile!" he called. Both men came hastily out.

"'Mornin', Sheriff," Cady greeted. "Say, but that grub shore looks good. Did you send Williams up to Far Peak yet?"

"He's mos' there by this time, boys. Get your chuck while it's hot. Ans left right after dinner. Be back to-morrow afternoon, easy enough."

"That's good!" Tindle replied; then, to Cady: "All right, Pete!" Before the old sheriff could make a move to defend himself he was grabbed by the two outlaws and rushed headlong into an empty cell.

"What's th' meanin' of this?" he protested. "You guys'll——" But a rough hand cut off further speech on the sheriff's part, and he was soon bound and gagged with long strips of dirty old jail-blanket. No longer could the sheriff protest, except with his eyes, and he looked daggers at his prisoners. Cady laughed.

"Told you what me lay was, Bill. Told you th' ol' fool would send Williams off on a wild-goose chase, an' that we could tie this bird up an' vamoose. I knew you'd have a fit when you thought I'd squealed on you, but I just couldn't help it. It was th' only way, shorta murderin' this boob, that I could see to get out. You hear, Sheriff? You see, you had me cold an' I needed help. Who could I get to aid me? Why not have you go an' get the best guy in th' world, me ol' partner!"

Could Sheriff Walker have replied his answer would unquestionably have been interesting! But Jerry naturally couldn't. If looks could have killed . . . He was outplayed, and had fallen for it. He remembered Anson William's warning: "When an old dog starts doin' new tricks, is th' time to watch him." But now it was too late. Ans had been wiser than he was. He had swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker. He could only scowl and squirm.

"Don't take it too hard, ol'-timer," Tindle laughed. "Remember that Pete's snitchin' fooled even me. He pulled a fast one, is all. Now we're takin' yo're gun an' keys an' goin' after th' rest of our loot. Donovan ain't got it; don't worry. Sorry you gave Pete's share back. We'd 'a' made you kick in with that, but we know you ain't got it handy."

Leaving the old sheriff bound and gagged, the two outlaws pocketed his gun and keys and left the county building.

When the sheriff did not bring her the dirty dishes at the time he should have done so, Mrs. Walker started to find out if he had forgotten them. She could not find him, and this greatly worried her. She called in a passerby, and after a long search they located him. Old Jerry had worked the gag a bit loose and was groaning feebly.

But then came more trouble. The outlaws had locked the cell-block door behind them, and men with heavy hacksaws had to be summoned before Walker could be reached. Finally, however, they made it, unbounded and ungagged the unwilling prisoner, whereupon he promptly fainted. A doctor was hastily summoned, and the sheriff was carried out to his office.

"Nothing dangerous," the medical man advised. But when he would have spoken further, they were interrupted by the entrance of Deputy Williams with two crestfallen prisoners!

Right! The men were Pete Cady and Bill Tindle. Let Anson personally explain:

"I never put no faith in a damned stool-pigeon's statements, nohow," he began. "So when Cady snitched I was doubtful. Even when he told the truth about Tindle's whereabouts I was still skeptical. I knew Cady, you see; knew he was no snitcher. So when Jerry tells me about the loot up at Far Peak, I sneak out an' call up Tom Donovan. 'Nothin' here belongin' to them fellers,' Big Tom says, an' I lays low waitin' for th' blow-off. I can't quite figger out what it's goin' to be, but I know it's something. Finally out they come, an' I just foller along like a good dog, till they lead me to their loot. Then I clap down on 'em. S'prised? I'll tell th' world!"

"You got 'em, Ans?" cried the sheriff, who had come to his senses in time to hear the last of his deputy's story. "You say you got 'em?"

"You betcha, Sheriff. Nailed 'em, an' th' rest of th' loot."

"Good boy, Ans. An' th' next time any ol' dog starts doin' an new tricks, we'll both set in on 'em!"

THE STORY OF BOONE HELM

One of the most repulsive badmen the early West produced was Boone Helm. Some of the worst outlaws had a certain code and honor, and were respected in a certain way. This man, however, was without a single redeeming trait. It can be said of him that he did not stop at robbery and murder.

Having already gained a reputation as a bandit and killer in California, he is recorded in 1853 as starting out with six companions for Fort Hall, Idaho. The beginning of the winter season found these men in the mountain range of eastern Oregon. Besides being attacked by Indians, losing their way, and running out of supplies, their horses soon became exhausted. They then killed the horses and made snowshoes of the hides, intending to reach a settlement on foot. This amounted to one of those starving marches of the wilderness—which meant that the weak lay where they fell.

Boone Helm and a companion named Burton managed to push on ahead, leaving the others in the mountains. Burton gave out in an old abandoned cabin at which they stopped. According to his own report Helm was trying to get wood for a fire when he heard a shot and returned to find Burton dead. He stayed near the spot and preyed like a hyena on the body of his companion. He ate one leg and wrapping the remainder of the corpse in an old shirt, started on farther east. He had told the party that he had practiced cannibalism before, and intended doing so again if necessary.

He at length reached the Mormon settlements, boasting of what he had done and spending freely the sack of money he carried with him throughout his journey. He hired out as a Danite and killed a couple of men the Mormons wanted removed; but soon he was forced to leave and seek other regions.

Next he set out for his old haunts in California. Here, on an out-of-the-way ranch, he robbed and killed a man who had taken him in and befriended him when he was fleeing from vengeance. Coming back to Oregon he soon had numerous murders to his credit, and was suspected of many that were not known. In 1862 he turned up at Florence, where he killed a man in cold blood. The victim was Dutch Fred, who had not offended Helm in any way. No doubt the killing was done for hire. Helm shot his man while Fred stood looking him in the face, unarmed, and missing with the first shot, took deliberate aim for a second.

Being forced to leave Florence, he went north as far as British Columbia. Again he was reduced to a starving march, and again he was guilty of cannibalism. The British sent him back, and for a time he was held in jail at Portland, Oregon. He escaped, however, and for a while is supposed to have gone to Texas. But he soon reappeared in country familiar to him, and here he was captured at length by the vigilantes. When confronted with some of his crimes he swore on the Bible that he was innocent.

Yet he was not afraid to die. Before the six thousand men assembled in Virginia City to see him hanged, together with a number of other criminals, he bore himself defiant and ostentatiously unafraid. Just as Jack Gallegher, one of the other outlaws, was hanged, Boone Helm called out, "Kick away, old fellow, I'll be with you in hell in a minute!" Such last-minute bravado, however, was very little in his favor.

MONKEY-BUSINESS

By
Edgar K. Daniel

Denver and 'Frisco had for years nursed a grudge against the judge that "sent them up." They worked out lots of ideas of ways to get even, and even got a monkey to help with one of their disguises and dodges.

IN the splash of moonlight that poured through the doorway of the board shack a man was squatted cross-legged in front of a miscellaneous collection of odds and ends which were strewn in disorder upon his outspread coat. His face averted and in shadow, he was completely absorbed in what he was doing and seemingly altogether oblivious to his companion, who sprawled on his haunches against the open door.

"She near ready, 'Frisco?"

"She's that, Denver," 'Frisco replied, glancing up from what he was doing with a jerk.

His face was curiously striking as the moonlight revealed his finely chiseled features in which there was something strangely sinister. His thin lips were smiling, but there was something sardonic about them. All the evil in the world appeared to be living in the deeps of his dark eyes.

"We'll be puttin' this thing across tonight?" Denver queried.

"That we will," 'Frisco replied, resuming his labors.

Then, with a sharp metallic rattling of the chain that bound him to the hand-organ in the thick shadows, a little monkey, clad in gold-braided trousers and jacket, sprang into the moonlight and chattered shrilly upon the door-sill.

"An' I'll be more than glad," Denver grumbled, as he eyed the monkey with evident disgust. "I'm just about fed up on this business, 'Frisco. Th' monk especially has my goat."

"Forget th' monk," 'Frisco advised earnestly. "He's helpin' us to play this game out, you know. We're just two Wop organ-grinders an' nobody hereabouts is as much as imaginin' we ain't th' simon-pure articles."

"Nobody's wise," Denver agreed, "but just th' same th' monk——"

"There you go again," 'Frisco interrupted without any show of impatience. "That's all I hear. It's th' monk this an' it's th' monk that from mornin' till night. Put on another record, Denver. I'm gettin' much too much of your monkey solo. Try YES, WE HAVE NO BANANAS or something else that nobody's heard. Give us something new."

Denver grunted.

"Th' monk's finishin' th' picture for us," 'Frisco argued. "Th' dye on our mugs, th' rings in our ears, th' organ an' th' monk, especially th' monk, Denver, are givin' us th' chance to do our stuff."

"Just th' same," Denver reiterated vehemently, "I'll be mighty glad when this little job's done."

"Who won't be?" 'Frisco answered sharply. "We said we'd square things with this guy Herbert, an' we're sure goin' to do it."

The monkey grimaced at Denver with paw to nose in an obscene gesture.

"You devil's spawn!" Denver choked, as he flung his cap at the little animal in a sudden excess of rage.

The monkey caught the head-covering deftly and began tearing it to pieces with sharp nails and teeth.

"Cut that!" Denver snarled savagely, as he seized the cap with frenzied hands.

The monkey resisted and Denver sent it sprawling out of doors with a cuff beside the ear.

"Have a heart!" 'Frisco protested.

"Have hell!" Denver retorted. "That monk ain't thumbin' his nose at me! Not on your life he ain't!"

Chattering fiercely, the chain jingling musically to his excited movements, the monkey edged back to the door-sill. Whimpering like a beaten child, he stared from one man to the other with questioning eyes, as if seeking the answer to some problem that was troubling him. Finally he became silent, fascinated both by what 'Frisco was doing and by the array of objects upon the worker's outspread coat. Slyly he slid forward and thrust out a tiny paw.

"None of that, monk!" Denver snapped, as he struck the extended paw with his fist.

The monkey's eyes were glistening like black beads in his wrinkled face, as he retreated to nurse his bruised member and stared malevolently at his tormentor.

"You sure ain't showin' th' monk any consideration," 'Frisco protested.

"Talk sense!" Denver snarled.

"Talk sense?" 'Frisco wanted to know. "Ain't that just exactly what I've been doin' all th' time?"

"You've been usin' your head," Denver admitted without hesitation. "I've got to hand you that, 'Frisco."

"What's th' use crabbin' all th' time, then?"

Denver shrugged.

"That's all you're doin'—crabbin'."

"Th' monk's got me goin', I guess," Denver replied. "That's about th' long an' th' short of it, 'Frisco."

"Why don't you talk sense?" 'Frisco sneered.

"I am," Denver answered. "Th' monk's got my goat."

"What if he has?" 'Frisco insisted. "He's part of th' game. Forget your own feelin's for a while, Denver, an' think of th' rest of th' gang. We all got a stretch of five years with time off for good behavior. We've been lucky an' we're now on th' outside lookin' in. They hooked some other doin's on Slim an' sent him away for an' additional ten years. Dusty went West in th' pen hospital. Country got a bullet through his head in tryin' to take French leave. Think of them, Denver, an' stop bellyachin'."

Denver remained thoughtfully silent.

"We swore we'd get District Attorney Herbert for railroadin' us," 'Frisco went on with a cruel leer, "an' this night we're goin' to square things an' square them right. Herbert sent us away for somethin' none of us had a hand in. We promised him we'd settle accounts an' now we're goin' to do it. We're goin to do it proper, too. After we pay him our best regards this night, Herbert won't be railroadin' any more poor devils."

"That he won't!" Denver snorted.

"Only yesterday," 'Frisco continued reminiscently, "when you went to buy some cigarettes, Herbert came walkin' along th' main drag with his little girl. He gave her a coin to put in th' monk's cup. He didn't as much as glance at me. I was fairly itchin' to throttle him then, but we've got a better way, Denver, a much better way!"

"You're sayin' a mouthful, 'Frisco."

"Things sure broke right for us," 'Frisco resumed. "Herbert's got himself in Dutch with th' strikers in this man's town. We'll bump him off an' th' strikers will get th' blame. What do you want better than that? We'll be leavin' th' strikers holdin' th' bag. We'll put in our licks an' then be on our way. While th' thick-witted bulls are busy findin' someone to grab, we'll be gettin' out from under, Denver. That's as sure as th' good Lord made little green apples to give foolish kids colic."

"That thing near done?" Denver demanded, indicating what 'Frisco was holding.

"She's done at last!" the latter exulted.

"Let's have a look at her."

"Sure!"

'Frisco scrambled to his feet hurriedly and moved to the doorway, where the two men leaned over the thing in 'Frisco's hands with feverishly bright eyes.

"Looks innocent enough!" Denver chuckled evilly.

"She's all ready but th' percussion cap," 'Frisco explained with a note of pride in his

voice. "This cute baby's timed to do her talkin' at five G. M. We'll set her where she's bound to do th' most good. Then we'll slip back here an' be on our way. When Herbert's house goes to pieces like a bundle of sticks, we'll be so far away we won't even be hearin' th' explosion. That's why we pulled up stakes last night an' left town. Nobody's wise to our hidin' out here. We'll get away with this as slick as a whistle."

Denver grinned.

"Fetch th' caps," 'Frisco ordered. "I want to get this thing finished. At midnight we'll set her under th' side veranda of Herbert's house. That's right under where he sleeps. Th' caps are under that loose plank in th' floor."

While 'Frisco stared down at the instrument of destruction of his own contriving, Denver groped back into the shadows. He lifted the loose plank and fumbled around in the cavity beneath.

"What's keepin' you?" 'Frisco wanted to know.

"Huh?"

"Why th' delay?"

"Th' caps ain't here," Denver grunted.

"Are you goin' balmy?"

"This hole's empty!"

"What?"

"It's plumb cleaned!"

"Th' hell you say!"

"Come see for yourself," Denver invited.

'Frisco darted away from the door and joined Denver. Holding the time-bomb carefully in his left hand, he struck a match with his right.

"Easy with th' light," Denver cautioned. "You know we ain't wantin' to advertise our bein' here."

But 'Frisco cast discretion to the winds, as he struck match after match and diligently inspected the hole under the floor.

"Not a cap here!" he finally ejaculated with a string of foul oaths. "Not a damned thing left in th' hole but scraps of paper!"

He glanced at his companion quizzically, as though seeking the answer to the riddle in his dumbfounded features.

"Th' monk's been up to his fool tricks!" Denver sneered and straightened. "Damn his monkey-business!"

"With no caps," 'Frisco miserably voiced his disappointment, "we can't be finishin' th' bomb. I could have used a fuse, but that's all gone, too."

"It's the monk's doin's," Denver insisted. "He saw us workin' under that plank an' he's followed suit. Let me get a good whack at him, 'Frisco. One wallop an' he'll be through for keeps. One wallop, 'Frisco. Let me——"

As one man they turned and faced the monkey.

"Not so fast!" 'Frisco croaked, clutching at his companion's arm and holding the irate man back.

"You still standin' up for th' damned hairy nuisance?" Denver demanded angrily, at the same time endeavoring to break the other's restraining hold. "This is th' monk's finish, 'Frisco! I'll choke th' damn thing, so help me!'

"Nothin' doin'!" 'Frisco choked. "Look at him, Denver!"

The sudden note of terror in 'Frisco's voice caused Denver to come to his cooler senses with a jolt. Discretion restrained his avenging impulses.

"I ain't gettin' you, 'Frisco."

"Look at th' monk!"

"I'm sick of th' sight of him," Denver answered.

"Look at him!"

"What else am I doin', 'Frisco?" Denver growled. "Let go of my arm an' I'll smash him!"

"He's playin' with something in th' doorway!" Frisco groaned.

The monkey, apparently blind and deaf to the two humans, was squatting on the moon-flooded door-sill carefully examining a glass tube that glinted in his paws.

"You know what th' monk's playin' with, Denver?" 'Frisco asked in a voice that shook in spite of his every effort to control it.

Denver shook his head in a vigorous negative.

"Th' stuff in that tube he's holdin' is nitro-glycerine," 'Frisco whispered.

"Lord!" Denver breathed. "Le'ts get out of here!"

He darted for the door, but the monkey looked up and glared at him. His skinny

arm lifted and drew back. He was ready to hurl the explosive.

"Watch your step!" 'Frisco warned. "It looks like th' monk's innin' now. He's got us cornered, Denver, thanks to th' way you've been rough-housin' him."

Denver stopped abruptly and then retreated with alacrity. The hairy arm descended slowly and the monkey again became absorbed in what he was holding. Denver, courageous through desperation, began inching toward the entrance. The monkey glanced up quickly. His lips curled away from his chattering teeth in an evil grin, as he once more made as if to hurl the tube.

"No go!" Frisco gulped. "We're sure in a tight place, Denver. There ain't no windows. That's why we holed in here. Th' door's th' only way out an', if we try that with th' monk in his present mood, we'll be makin' our exit through th' roof. We'll have to wait him out, Denver."

"Wait him out like hell!" Denver answered with whole-hearted sincerity. "He's liable to drop that stuff any minute an' that'll mean curtains for us, 'Frisco, without any music an' no flowers. I ain't beat yet! No siree! Not on your life!"

He stumbled blindly toward the rear of the shack.

"Luck for us, 'Frisco, that this shack's flimsy," he muttered, as he began kicking out the boards. "We'll knock a hole out of this in a jiffy an' leave th' fool monk to have his own bang-up party."

"Here's hopin'," 'Frisco answered throatily.

"Get busy!" Denver growled with impatience.

With new hope in his heart, 'Frisco set to work, too. They pounded against the boards with violent heel-thrusts. Although the shack was flimsy, the timber resisted stoutly. They increased their efforts. The dry boards creaked, the rusty nails gave way and the wood began to splinter.

"We'll be out of here in three shakes now!" Denver gasped, breathless from his unaccustomed labors.

'Frisco nodded and worked all the harder.

The monkey on the door-sill looked up and peered into the darkness with questioning eyes. As though charmed, the men watched him, while their heels beat a frenzied tattoo upon the boards. The monkey was absorbed in their strange actions and in the unusual accompanying noises. Getting to his feet with the utmost gravity, he shuffled toward the men and banged the deadly tube against the loose boards with his paw in a clumsy imitation of the two men.

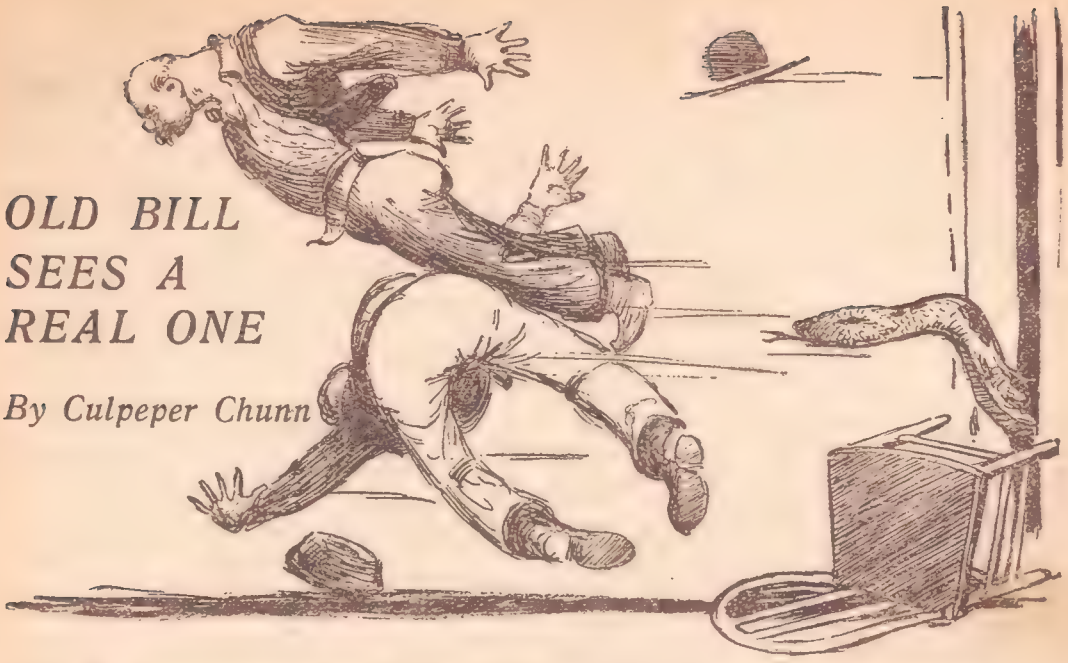
"Mamma!" District Attorney Herbert's little daughter called drowsily, roused from her sleep by the sound of a terrific explosion that shook the night and rumbled overhead like the passing of reverberating thunder. "What's that?"

"Somebody's blasting, I suppose, Alice," her mother made a random guess, as she tucked the covers around the child. "Don't be afraid. Even though Daddy's away for the night, you are perfectly safe here with mother and the servants."

And little Alice, reassured, smilingly resumed her slumbers.

OLD BILL SEES A REAL ONE

By Culpeper Chunn



Old Bill is one of the best-loved members of the ACE-HIGH family. We like the way he boasts and blows about himself—and then without intention makes good his boasts! In this latest rollicking adventure his idle words lead him into a serious tangle. We could almost feel sorry for his plight, but we haven't time to stop from laughing.

"SPEAK not to me of snakes, my worthy friend," said "Old Bill" Nevit, proprietor of the Come Back Saloon. "The subject is disgusting. Mere mention of the loathsome things turns my whiskey into wormwood and gall. Besides, you can tell me nothing new about the breed. I have forgotten more about snakes than you will ever know."

He put his glass to his lips and hastily drained it, taking the whiskey by surprise, as it were, before it could rebel. His patrons, a group of punchers with whom he was mingling at the bar, addressed themselves nervously to their own drinks and waited for the play that had been arranged for his especial benefit to begin.

For if there was one thing they loved above all others, it was to play a practical joke on the pompous but not unpopular little saloonkeeper, and the arrival in Yellow Dog that evening of the "Cyclopean Circus & Menagerie," in four rickety conveyances, had afforded them an opportunity to indulge in their favorite sport, which they had not been slow to seize.

The stage having been set for what was believed to be a masterpiece of fun-making, "Fatty" Bullard, the angular, rat-faced foreman of the Flying Y, and the ringleader of the conspiracy, had raised the curtain, so to speak, by casually remarking that the day before he had fallen into a den of rattlers and by some miracle of good fortune had escaped uninjured after killing six of the largest specimens he had ever seen. And Old Bill, as had been desired, had unsuspectingly taken his cue.

Fatty was quick to follow it up.

"But these yhere was yellow snakes with pink whiskers," he protested, argumentatively. "Some uh them was over ten feet long, too, I allow."

Old Bill, as usual a little tipsy, snorted.

"And what of that?" was his contemptuous reply. "I have seen snakes of every color, length, width, shape, size and nationality—every kind of snake, I may say, that there is to be seen, including a number that are not to be seen. I have seen red snakes, roan snakes, green snakes, sorrel snakes, freckled snakes, piebald snakes, blond and brunette snakes. I have seen long snakes, short snakes, slim snakes, fat snakes, horned snakes, crippled snakes, deformed snakes, cross-eyed snakes, and snakes that were probably not snakes at all. I have seen

snakes that talked, laughed, swore, smoked, drank, performed gymnastics, and, in fact, did everything else that snakes are supposed to do—or, rather, are not supposed to do. Don't talk to me about puny little snakes but ten feet long. They are—are Lilliputians. I have seen snakes eighty feet long, and longer."

Fatty winked elaborately at the punchers.

"Mebbe," he drawled, "but the snakes I seen was real snakes. I allow them yuh're talkin' about air only imaginary snakes, an' them kind uh snakes, seein' as how they ain't snakes a-tall, is as harmless as pussycats."

Old Bill looked him up and down coldly.

"It is true," he admitted, "that the reptiles to which I have reference were only visionary, or, in other words, creatures of the mind; but it is a fact, known to all but dolts and fools, that those are the most vicious and dangerous of all snakes. Real snakes may usually be seen in time to be trod upon before they can do any damage. Imaginary snakes, on the other hand, attack one from within and cannot be got at. They can only be allowed to do what they wish to do. I could tell you—but what is the use of arguing with a man like you? Snakes that have no existence outside of my mind, I really fear. The other kind—bah!"

He snapped his fat fingers and filled his glass with whiskey. Raising it to his lips, he shuddered and set it down on the bar again.

"Yuh allow yuh ain't skeered uh live snakes none whatever?" asked the treacherous foreman, simulating astonishment.

"Certainly I'm not," retorted Old Bill. "What the devil is there about a live snake to be feared by a man of resource and courage? I, sir, am descended from pioneers and soldiers."

Fatty looked at the punchers meaningly. Strangely agitated, they began to make mysterious signs to him and nod violently at the front door. Nodding back at them to signify his understanding, he emptied his glass and cleared his throat.

"Wal, I allow I ain't gonna r'ar up none about it if yuh air," he commented. "Seein' as how yuh air a sorter cossyneer uh repteels, real an' unreal, I allow yuh ought tuh know yuhr sentiments for them better'n I do. Personal, I cyan't say I'm partial tuh either kind. But—— Sufferin' catamounts! whuzzat?"

He whirled, as if he had heard some alarming sound. With his face to the door, he stood staring. Old Bill, in unison with the punchers, also turned, and, dropping his glass, reared backward so violently he almost knocked the bar loose from its moorings.

And little wonder! For there, on the saw-dust covered floor of the dingy room, lay the thick, glistening coils of a monstrous, mottled snake!

Old Bill's eyes protruded; his bloated face turned a sickly green.

"Gotamighty," he gasped, faintly. "Look!"

"What at?" demanded Fatty.

"At that snake," came Old Bill's hoarse whisper.

The foreman stared.

"What snake?" he asked.

"There," squealed Old Bill, too frightened even to point.

Fatty wrinkled his brows. Like the punchers, he was looking squarely at the reptile, but appeared not to see it.

"Whar's it at?" he cried, drawing his gun.

"In front of the faro bank, you damned fool!" yelled Old Bill, shaking as from an ague.

"Smiley" Jones, the suave, sleek-looking faro dealer, rose hastily from his chair, leaned over the table and glanced at the huge reptile, appeared to see nothing, shrugged delicately, and, resuming his seat, began, with complete indifference, to riffle a deck of cards.

"D'yuh see it, Smiley?" demanded Fatty.

"Nope," was the dealer's laconic reply.

Fatty took off his sombrero and scratched his head.

"Wal, I'm blamed if *I* see it," he declared, looking all around the saloon and finally at the ceiling as if he expected to find the snake there. "How about it, gents?"

The punchers, who actually in their own minds were debating whether to stand their ground or flee for their lives, vehemently and profanely denied any knowledge of the

snake's existence. Several of the less courageous of them, however, finding the joke, personified by the snake, somewhat more than they had bargained for, began to climb up on the bar.

"I reckon yuh're seein' things again, Old Bill," said "Happy" Yowl, a Cross O Cross wrangler. "That air snake yuh see air one uh them 'maginary ones yuh was tellin' us about, I allow. That shore ain't no snake out thar on the floor. Hang me for a hoss thief if thar is."

Old Bill pressed a trembling hand to his brow. He looked at Fatty piteously.

"I fear," he groaned, "I greatly fear that I am having the horrors again. "That snake—there is certainly a snake there—if you cannot see it—alas!"

He sighed, like a man who is resigned to death, and stared at the snake with glassy eyes. The reptile, a twenty-foot python, as thick in the middle as a man's thigh, raised its head from the floor and began to move slowly from side to side with an air of inquiry. Cold sweat burst from Old Bill's forehead and his muscles began to twitch convulsively. He began a cautious retreat.

Attracted by the movement of his body, the python fixed its beady, lidless eyes on him, looked at him for a moment, and then, suddenly lowering its head, began, with graceful undulations of its body, to work its way toward him. Old Bill, his nerve broken, jumped as if a current of electricity had passed through his body.

"Murder!" he shrieked. "Help! Save me! Kill it!"

He dashed across the floor to a door opening into his room and wrenched it open. The snake, evidently puzzled by his strange behavior, lazily followed. Darting through the opening, Old Bill turned to slam the door, saw the python close at his heels, emitted a wild yell and fled into the room, still leisurely pursued by the inquisitive reptile.

A roar of laughter went up from the punchers. It was one thing to stand facing the python and quite another to see it chasing its intended victim, and even those who had lost their enthusiasm for the affair upon beholding the snake, now began to perceive in the situation a certain amount of humor. Applauding both the reptile and Old Bill, therefore, without partiality, they swarmed across in front of the door, in order to miss nothing of what was going on in the room.

Not so, however, Jake Cullins, the cadaverous, beetle-browed barkeeper. Although, like Smiley Jones, he was in the conspiracy, and not entirely out of sympathy with it, he thought the joke was being carried too far. He caught Fatty by the sleeve.

"Look a-yhere, Fatty," he expostulated. "I allow Old Bill's had enough for one night. Anyhow, that air ser-pant's got a mean-lookin' eye, an' might hurt him, shore enough."

Fatty, who was having the time of his life, guffawed.

"That air snake won't hurt nothin'," he asssured the barkeeper. "Madam Repteelly, the snake charmer, what owns him, says he's so old he's got senile dementment. He's as weak as a bob-tailed flush, an' ain't got no fangs, nohow. He couldn't hurt a horned toad. Don't worry none, Jake. Leave it to me. I ain't gonna let Bill git hurt."

Jake, conscious of having done his duty, returned to the bar, while the gangling foreman again gave his undivided attention to Old Bill.

The terrified old salonkeeper was having a time of it. Having reached a table on the farthest side of the room, he was now struggling to get on top of it. After several vain attempts, due to the shortness of his legs and the rotundity of his body, he succeeded, and then, without stopping, tried to climb up the wall. The punchers made the windows rattle with their laughter. Old Bill, however, was scarcely conscious of their presence.

Failing to find a foothold on the wall, he turned and, transfixed with terror, cringed against the boards. The python, which had stopped just inside the door, waved its wicked, diamond-shaped head from one side to the other and eyed him hungrily. Old Bill's limbs shook. He looked around him wildly for a weapon. The python, its curiosity whetted, moved a little nearer to the table. Old Bill, still not altogether sure whether the snake was real or a figment of

his mind, looked at the punchers appealingly.

"Save me, I beseech you," he implored them, in a thin treble. "I call upon you in the name of heaven to render me aid. Have you no heart, no feeling? Shoot that demon, I beg of you. It is about to devour me."

But the callous punchers were deaf to his appeal.

"When did it turn intuh a demon?" snickered "Hop Along" Garvey. "Yuh allowed awhile ago it war a snake, an' allowed it strong."

"Shore it ain't a hippypotlemus?" asked Happy.

"Er a kangleroo?" said another puncher.

"We cyan't shoot somethin' what ain't," interposed the grinning foreman. "Thar ain't no snake thar, Old Bill. Yuh've gone woozy?"

"You're a liar!" yelled Old Bill, but without conviction. "Don't I see the beast there in front of me? Look! There on the floor in front of the table."

The hilarious punchers made an elaborate pretense of looking for the snake.

"It mought be thar," admitted Fatty, "but I'm danged if I see it."

Annoyed by the uproar, the python advanced a little farther into the room.

"Whoo-eeee!" shrieked Old Bill, and tried to push the wall down.

The punchers howled. Old Bill, finding the boards unyielding, again looked around frantically for something to defend himself with, and his gaze encountered a length of one-inch iron pipe, one end of which was resting on the table. It was one of several similar lengths he had bought to pipe water into his room, an undertaking which so far he had not had sufficient energy to do anything about except postpone. Seizing it, he raised it with an effort and struck at the snake.

The pipe, however, was too short to do any damage, the end of it just reaching the tip of the indignant reptile's nose. Crooking its neck, the python darted its tongue. Old Bill, with a wild light in his eyes, brandished the pipe. Angered, the python coiled and struck at it. Then its great jaws opened and Old Bill found himself looking down into the hideous red cavity of its mouth.

"Spit in its eye," called Hop Along, encouragingly.

"Talk tuh it," advised Happy. "Snakes is got sense. Er whyfore should a diamond-back rattle his tail before he strikes?"

"Tell it tuh go home an' behave itself," chuckled Fatty. "Dignified repteels ain't got no bizness galivantin' around this time uh night."

But if Old Bill heard, he paid no heed. Babbling incoherently, he thrust one end of the pipe in the python's mouth to hold it off; then, suddenly inspired, he grasped the neck of a quart bottle of whiskey laying on the table and drew the cork with his chattering teeth. With a vague hope that the whiskey might render the snake as insensible as it sometimes rendered him, he poured the contents of the bottle down the other end of the pipe.

A tremor shook the python's body as the fiery stuff began to run down its gullet; slaver dripped from its jaws. Seemingly bewildered, however, it at first lay passively and made no effort to move its head. By the time it had decided that it might be advisable for it to do so, most of the quart of whiskey was in its interior. Several of the punchers, scenting trouble, had started to protest, but were restrained by the foreman, who was as curious to see what effect the whiskey would have on the snake as he had been to see what effect the snake would have on the saloonkeeper.

Dropping the pipe, since its weight had become too much for him, Old Bill gulped down the half-pint of whiskey that remained in the bottle, and then, wondering what would be the result of his experiment, watched the python in the agony of suspense. For a moment, it looked as if the snake had been knocked out, for it let its head sink down on the floor and lay perfectly still. A wild hope flared up in Old Bill's breast, to flicker out almost at once, for as the high-powered whiskey began to get in its work on the snake, the long body commenced to writhe, slowly at first, but gradually becoming more and more agitated.

Raising its head from the floor, it coiled and uncoiled and lashed out with its tail.

Its head rocked drunkenly, its jaws opened and closed viciously. Slaver poured freely from its mouth. Slowly, as the whiskey got a firmer hold on it, it worked itself into a raging, twisting mass of horror resembling nothing if not a dragon writhing in the flames of hell.

Suddenly remembering the terrified saloonkeeper who, for the moment, it appeared to have forgotten, it gave vent to a hiss that froze the marrow in his bones, and darted toward him, its massive, dripping jaws working, the scales on its mottled body gleaming like jewels in the lamp light.

"Zweeeeeeekkkk!" screeched Old Bill, hurling himself against the wall.

Repulsed, as formerly, after almost dashing his brains out, he shrieked again and, as the python lunged at him, gathered himself together and precipitated himself over its churning body. Landing on the floor on one ear, he regained his feet with the agility of a cat and tore out of the room like a madman, which he undoubtedly was, with the baffled but grimly determined python exerting itself to the utmost to overtake him.

The punchers scattered. Yelling and cursing at thus finding the tables more or less turned on themselves, they turned tail and made for the front door. Old Bill saw them as he entered the saloon.

"Hold!" he bawled, without slackening his pace. "Desert me not, base cowards! Strike down that hellish thing before it overtakes me! It will kill me! It will kill us all! Shoot it, you blankety-blank-blank-blanks!"

Two of the punchers, fearing for their own lives, drew their guns, but before they could fire Fatty threw himself in front of them.

"Yuh blank fools," he shouted. "That snake's worth a thousand dollars. Yuh'll have tuh pay—— Whoop! Wheeee!"

He leaped violently to one side as the python, now almost upon him, struck viciously at the seat of his trousers, and took to his heels. The others, some of whom were now almost as terrified as Old Bill was, lost no time in following. Capably led by the saloonkeeper, who was running so fast it was difficult to see him distinctly, they abandoned the saloon and sought safety in the street. But in vain, for the intoxicated python, evidently bent upon destruction, slid out of the door behind them like a streak of well-greased lightning and completed their rout.

"Helen Blazes!" swore Fatty, becoming alarmed. "Somebody run an' git Madam Repteelly. Hurry up, yuh blank-blanks, for the love uh—— Hey! Yip! Yeeee!"

The python made another savage swipe at him and he rose into the air like a jack-in-the-box. The other punchers, as well as Jake and the faro dealer, having acquired a sudden distaste for the fun-making, disappeared in the darkness. The foreman made another amazing leap as the python followed up its attack with a hiss and a lunge and dashed down the street in the wake of Old Bill who, wheezing like a leaky steam engine, was going strong.

Fatty, with the infuriated snake but a few yards behind and gaining at every jump, also went strong. He worked his long legs as they had never been worked before in an effort to put Old Bill between himself and the python, but the saloonkeeper had his own ideas about the matter. Letting himself out a little when he heard sounds of pursuit, he circled the row of frame buildings adjoining the Come Back and, touching a high spot now and then, headed for the saloon again.

It was reached in record time. Swerving, when the building loomed up before him, he shot through the door in full career, stumbling over a spittoon, turned a complete somersault and landed on the floor on his back. Fatty, too close to him to stop, tried to jump over him, but tripped and fell on top of him. The next instant the sleek body of the python glided over the foreman's legs, shuddered to a stop, and, with almost incredible speed, began to wrap its coils around him.

"Death an' fury!" yelled Fatty, battling for his life.

Old Bill, bleating like a sheep, squirmed from under him, staggered to the door, and utterly exhausted, fell sprawling. Fatty, meantime, was fighting as he had never fought before. A desperate struggle brought him to his feet, but the thick coils of the python continued to close around

him and he could not tear them loose. For the first time in his life perhaps real fear took possession of the foreman.

"Hel-up!" he roared. "Hey! Come a-runnin'! O Glory! Turn me loose, yuh blank—ouch! Hey, Happy—Hop Along! Whar yuh at? C'mere, quick! Whoop! Yuh blankety-blank-blank, lemme go."

He tried to get his guns out, but the python's coils, which were slowly tightening, had his arms pinioned to his sides. Finding that he could do nothing, therefore, he abandoned himself to his terror.

"Eeeeeewhoooahhh!" he shrieked. "It's killin' me! Ouch! Helen Glory! Whar'n the blank-blank air yuh all at? Ou-wich! Whooee! My gusts is bustin' out! O Lordy! O Lordy! Help! Help! I'm dyin'! Hel—"

Enraged by his yells, as well as by the resistance he offered the python, which had got a purchase on the footrail of the bar with its tail, suddenly gave its body a violent twist and lifted him off his feet. As he was powerless to help himself, he fell like a log, striking his head against the footrail in front of the bar. Stunned, his eyes closed and his muscles relaxed; whereupon the snake, doubtless believing it had crushed his life out, and its own strength being nearly spent, began to uncoil.

Needless to say, none of this was lost on the old saloonkeeper. Still laboring to regain his breath on the floor in front of the door, he watched the python's every movement in an ecstasy of horror. Given sudden strength by the ominous *thwrack* of its body as it dropped the foreman and flopped to the floor, he rose to his feet as if propelled by powerful springs and turned to project himself into the street, when into the saloon walked a woman.

A tall, stately creature, she was, of a certain age, painted and highly decorated and, despite her tawdriness and excess of ornament, not at all disagreeable to the eye. Stopping when she saw Old Bill, she regarded him haughtily, with arms akimbo.

"What ees thees I hear about Sultana, my python?" she asked, her not unpleasant voice weighed down with what she evidently believed to be a strong French accent. "Where ees my snake?"

Old Bill, with one eye on the python, protruded the other one at her.

"Your snake?" he wheezed. "Merciful heaven, madam, is the monster yours?"

"But certainly eet ees mine," she assured him. "I am Madam Repteelly, of ze Cyclopean Cir—— Ah!"

A sharp *plop* directed her attention to the drunken python, which was flopping about on the floor as if in pain. At the same instant, Fatty, regaining consciousness, opened his eyes, saw the snake, emitted a piercing scream and, springing to his feet, hurled himself out of the door.

Madam Repteelly looked at him in astonishment. When he was no longer to be seen, she arched her brows at Old Bill.

"What ees ze matter wiz zat man?" she demanded. "He ees ze man who hired my Sultana at one hundred dollars ze hour. And what ees ze matter wiz Sultana? What meks heem act so strangely?"

"What makes him act so strangely?" quavered Old Bill. "How in heaven should I know, madam? It is bewitched, possessed of devils. If it is yours, get it out of here, and I will worship you till my dying day."

She drew up her shoulders.

"Eez zat a proposal?" she queried, her lip curling.

"I—I am not prepared to say," stammered Old Bill.

She paralyzed him with a glance and, turning her back on him, walked over to the python.

"Sultana!" she said, imperiously. "Come to me. What ees ze matter wiz you? Stop weegling zat way. I command eet."

Snapping the fingers of one of her plump white hands, she bent over fearlessly and laid the other one on the tortured body of the python.

"Be careful, madam," yelled Old Bill, coming suddenly to life.

But the warning came too late. At the touch of her hand, the dying python, recognizing neither the caress nor the one who gave it, turned and twisted convulsively and gathered her into its coils.

"Sultana!" she screamed, trying to free herself. "Stop! What ails you? Oh! Sultana! You are hurting me. Oooooohhh!"

Flinging her backward, the powerful reptile arched its neck and, fixing its gleaming eyes on hers, opened its slavering jaws as if to engulf her.

"Madam!" burbled Old Bill aghast.

She held out her arms to him.

"Save me!" she cried, despairingly.

"Madam!" he repeated, idiotically.

"Help!" she shrieked, abandoning her French accent in favor of one that seemed to come more natural to her. "Arrah, the baste is murthering me! Oh! Oh! May the saints preserve me! Whoop! Mercy! The monster has gone mad! Help me! Save me! O-rah! Ooooooeeeee! Dying I be and I have not confessed me sins. Oohoorah! Whoop! Pity me! Help! help!"

Nor was her appeal in vain. Convinced at last of the snake's reality, Old Bill's manhood, or at least the spark of it that remained to him, asserted itself. Forgetful of self, with the screams of the hysterical woman ringing in his ears, he picked up the first weapon at hand, which happened to be the spittoon he had stumbled over, and hurled it at the python's head, just as the swinging door crashed open and the sheriff, followed by several conscious-stricken punchers, rushed into the saloon to the rescue.

The spittoon missed its objective by a good twelve inches, but, by an odd coincidence, as it whizzed past Madam Repteelly's nose, the aged python, overcome at last by the over-dose of whiskey Old Bill had given it, collapsed, its coils falling loosely from the woman's body, in such a manner as to make it appear that the missile had struck and felled it.

Scrambling beyond its reach, in a most undignified way, the badly frightened snake charmer rushed up to Old Bill and, as a volley of shots from the punchers' guns ended the miserable snake's existence, threw her arms around him.

"Darlint man," she cried, embracing him warmly. "May the good saints reward you. *Oui, oui,* monseer. A brave man you are, a darlint and a hero. You saved me from a horrible death, monseer. Arrah, I thought me time had come. I'm trembling yit, begorra. Sultana—I know not what was the matter wiz her. Mon Doo! She has always been so gentle, so docile. The poor baste went mad, I'm thinking."

Old Bill's breast swelled like a pouter pigeon's. Drunkard and reprobate though he now undoubtedly was, however, there had once been a time when he had been something finer, and in moments such as this he did not forget his breeding. Wiggling out of her arms, therefore, he executed a bow that did credit to both his waistline and his Southern instincts.

"Madam," he quavered, trying in vain to make his voice steady, "I thank you for your gracious words, but, inasmuch as I did not more than my duty, I do not feel that I deserve them. I ask no greater reward than having been able to serve you. It is a pleasure and an honor to have saved one so beautiful."

Madam Repteelly looked at him coyly and lowered her eyes, while the punchers, delighted by his gallantry, voiced vociferous approval.

"If yuh only done yuhr duty, I'd shore admire tuh say yuh done it noble," observed Happy, admiringly. "Uh the whole bloomin' bunch uh us, yuh was the only one who had the guts tuh stay an' fight the py-thoon. We're shore air proud uh yuh, old-timer."

Old Bill coughed. Like the others, he fully believed that he had rendered the python *hors de combat* with the spittoon, and while he did not feel that their praise was undeserved, he did feel that it was going to make him burst. Remembering a picture of St. George and the dragon he had once seen, he placed one foot on the writhing carcass of the reptile and, with an inward shudder, looked down at it contemptuously.

"I fear, my friends, that you do me too much honor," he remarked, in a manner to convey that he believed nothing of the kind. "There can scarcely be bravery when there is a total lack of fear, and, as I have already pointed out to you, I am not afraid of any snake extant. Once I had made up my mind to make away with this monster, I rushed in with great pleasure and slew it."

And the punchers, in the indisputable light of what had happened, believed him. As a matter of fact, Old Bill almost believed himself.

VANISHING HERDS

By
Grant Taylor

A FIVE-PART SERIAL OF WESTERN ADVENTURE

PART FOUR

Read The Complete Details In The Opening Paragraphs Of What Has Happened And Go On With the Story

ONE night near the Border a large gang of rustlers drive off Hank Caldwell's 300-head herd of cattle. In spite of wide search not a trace of the stolen beeves is found. The only clue is that connected with an unknown girl who gave Barry Pinger, foreman of Caldwell's Lazy H-C outfit, a hurried warning just before the rustlers arrived.

Barry and Zephyr Bill Badger, old H-C waddy, ease into the nearby sheep town of Oveja to pick up information. At the Palacio Saloon they learn from Jerkline Buford that Galvez, proprietor of the saloon and "big man" in town, is sending baled hay to the sheep ranch of a certain Don Mike Mentelejon. Don Mike is one of Caldwell's oldest friends and neighbors. Also, Barry finds the mysterious girl of the night before working for Galvez as barmaid.

At this point Jim Falk, recently imported foreman for Don Mike whom Barry believes he has seen before, gets unpleasant with the girl in question. Barry interferes, beats to the draw Falk's companion West, a skilled gunman, and floors him with a shot.

He and Zephyr Bill back out under cover of their guns, escaping further effects of the hostility of other sheepmen present.

But trouble is just beginning. Caldwell is unable to get extension on his money at the bank, since Galvez and Don Mike have withdrawn their accounts, leaving the bank short. Caldwell can raise some money on his remaining steers, and decides to ship them. Barry, Zephyr Bill, and Tom, Caldwell's son, go along with the cattle train to act as guards. At no great distance down the line the train is held up by masked riders, and in spite of desperate resistance, the H-C men are overpowered. Tom, following the rustlers, is later shot dead by them. The attackers unload the cattle—and Hank Caldwell is cleaned out entirely.

Next Caldwell is informed that if he does not meet his paper at the bank within five

days, his ranch and stock will be foreclosed. Barry and Zephyr Bill start out on the trail of the men who killed Tom and rustled the cattle, intending both to avenge and save Hank Caldwell from complete ruin.

In Oveja Barry meets the girl who he believes has the key to the situation. She refuses to answer all questions, but gives her name—Gyp Macklin—and says that next day she might be able to give information of help to Caldwell.

The two H-C punchers also encounter Don Mike and Falk. The latter gives orders for Caldwell men to stay off Don Mike's range or be shot. When asked by Barry to corroborate this, Don Mike refuses to answer; he seems to be under the domination of Falk.

Later, Don Mike is found shot, and Falk accuses Barry and Zephyr Bill. They refuse arrest, however, and that night at the Palacio Saloon hostility toward them on the part of the sheepmen is frank and threatening. Galvez, as usual, pretends sympathy with Lazy H-C misfortunes. He seeks to enlist Barry's aid in persuading Caldwell to sell his ranch to him and Falk as partner. Galvez even offers a bribe, and Barry is now certain the saloonkeeper is the leading power in a scheme to deprive Caldwell of his ranch.

Barry refuses Galvez' offer; swears revenge against him to his crowd. As he is going out of the door several Mexicans jump him. A general mix-up follows, but Barry and Zephyr Bill shoot their way out to escape just as they see Falk coming toward the saloon with a crowd of sheepherders. As the two punchers hastily enter the corral for their horses, a woman comes up and informs them Galvez is holding Gyp Macklin a prisoner at his house. Immediately Barry swings his horse around and rides in that direction.

In spite of thick pursuits and equally thick shots, Barry and Zephyr Bill gain the Galvez house. They find the girl and are about to escape when a band of men blocks their way. Comes Jim Falk's voice: "You, Barry and Zephyr Bill, I got you holed up. Come on out, hands stretched over your heads, or we'll fill you full o' lead!"

CHAPTER XV

TRAILIN'

"WE'D better get out of here," said Barry. "We're in no shape to keep all of Falk's men out of this big house."

"We c'd burn a lot o' them feller's britches while they was leavin' thar callin' cards, Barry," said Zephyr Bill, cheering up at the prospect of taking part in another hot scrap. "Let's fight. Moon's comin' up and thar'll be plenty o' light t' pot these skunks fast as they come at us."

"No, we'd better skip," said the girl. She had extinguished the light and they stood hidden in the shadow of the house. "Listen! All of Falk's men, or practically all, are out front. They're figuring that you can't get your horses out back to escape because of the house blocking the way. Why not go out the back and make a run for it?"

"Afoot?" demanded Zephyr Bill. "Nossiree. Me, I stick tuh my hoss. Zephyr Bill retreats in style—on a hoss—if he retreats at all."

"You don't have to leave your horses. Take them with you," said the girl. "Of course they can't fly over the house, but you can lead them *through* the house! Quick! Come on, if your horses will follow you."

"This range skate o' mine is too bashful tuh go intuh a stable, let alone intuh a house," grumbled Zephyr Bill. "Howsomever, lead on, gal."

Following Gyp Macklin's suggestion, Barry, leading his horse, hastily followed the girl into the dark house and through one of the single rooms.

This room, like many others of that long, narrow style of adobe house, had doors opening both on the front and back yards.

Zephyr Bill's big dun snorted as his master pulled him toward the doorway, but Bill literally dragged the animal the first few steps by the bridle. The dun, once he was

inside the house, snorted great, suspicious snorts, but nevertheless he trod over the carpets and out the other door into the back yard. Here there was a little court and a small orchard beyond, all surrounded with the same high protecting wall as in front. As they appeared in the back, there was a yell from three riders watching from the other side of the wall. The men by virtue of sitting on their horses were placed just high enough so they could see over the wall. In the starlight and the light coming from the rising moon, the men's heads were dimly outlined to Gyp Macklin, Barry and Zephyr Bill.

Following the yell, a gun roared and spattered dust from the 'dobe bricks over Barry's head. Zephyr Bill bellowed and fanned a gun in answer.

"Bring the girl, Barry!" he roared as he mounted. "I'll clean out this nest o' polecats!"

Zephyr's big dun horse thundered straight toward the back gate and the riders beyond the wall, while Barry held a stirrup for the girl to mount his horse. But instead she ran toward the stable a little back of the house.

"I'll get my own pony," she flung back over her shoulder, and she came out leading a saddled mount. The next instant she and Barry were thundering toward the back gate after Zephyr Bill. With his guns barking, Zephyr Bill was chasing the men who had been watching the back, while they fled from his charge at top speed.

Barry's and Gyp Macklin's horses dashed through the gate. Barry yelled to Bill, and the big buckaroo swung his horse away from his pursuit and rejoined Barry and the girl. Already Falk's men in the front of the house, warned by the shots, were thundering toward them.

The three fugitives found themselves in a community of 'dobe houses, whose yards were filled with the usual clutter of haystacks, wagons, corrals and sheds. There was no road leading for the open country, except one that led directly back toward Falk's riders. With fences and houses blocking their passage, there remained but one way to go for the present, up a street leading directly to the center of the town. They would run a risk of meeting some of Falk's men that might be straying about down town, but that had to be chanced.

With horses racing along at top speed, the three dashed in single file, past strings of the adobe shoe-box houses, their horses' hoofs thudding hard on the packed ground of the narrow street. Zephyr Bill rode ahead with Gyp Macklin following, while Barry acted as rear guard.

Thundering after them came Falk and his strange band of riders, some fifteen or so in number, galloping fiercely in pursuit, firing wildly as they raced after the three. Only the many sharp bendings and twistings of the street prevented some of these shots from hitting either the pursued or their horses, for the rising moon and stars provided enough light for fairly accurate shooting.

Near the burning Palacio dancehall and saloon on the plaza, with the flames of the burning structure showing a mob of people watching, two men on foot and armed with rifles, tried to stop the three. Zephyr Bill gave one great bellow and rode at the two, reins between his teeth, his two belt guns spurting lead. Before this single man cavalry charge, one of the men fled with a wild yell. The other fired once and his bullet tore through Zephyr Bill's big sombrero before a bullet from one of Bill's big Bisley revolvers caught the man, sending him sprawling.

The crowd of people looking on raised a shrill yell. Their sympathy was all against the two cowboys who had been accused of murdering the popular sheep ranchman, Don Mike Montelejon.

With Zephyr Bill still leading the way, they safely crossed the plaza and swung sharply to the right, making for the open country beyond. Here, clear of the houses and fences, with Falk's men in hot pursuit, would come the real test of whether they would manage to escape or not.

Zephyr Bill still rode ahead, taking a course due south and paralleling an arroyo running directly south with banks some twenty feet in depth. When a hill temporarily hid them from sight of their pursuers, the big buckaroo swung his horse recklessly down the steep bank into the arroyo itself

and Gyp and Barry followed him. After dropping into the arroyo the three waited, hidden under a steep section of the arroyo's bank. They could hear the main body of Falk's riders thundering on past with guns popping wildly.

Zephyr Bill, once Falk and his men were out of sight, led Gyp Macklin and Barry back along the same direction the three had just come. The bottom of the arroyo was hard enough for them to make good time. They climbed out of the arroyo and when again nearing Oveja they struck out north across country. By the time Falk discovered he had lost the trail of the fugitives, the three were almost a half mile away.

"Fooled 'em!" said Bill as he slackened speed a few miles out of town. "Gosh, Barry, if only our pals were yere thar'd be a battle tuh be talked about f'r years afterwards, like they talk about the Big Wind in Texas! Hell, gimme jest five good scrappers and I'd send thet hull outfit skallyhootin'!"

They climbed out of the arroyo and continued northward at a rapid pace. Once or twice they heard parties of men still on the search, but there was little difficulty in eluding them.

After an hour's riding northward the girl, Gyp Macklin, reined up. For some time there had been no sound of pursuing parties. Either pursuit had been withdrawn or the pursuers had lost track of the three completely.

"And now," said Gyp, "I'll have to say *adios* to you two."

"*Adios?*" repeated Barry questioningly. "You're not going to leave us now, are you? You can see it's not safe for you to ride out alone. I thought you might be willing to tell us what you know about this cattle stealing and how Jim Falk is mixed up in it, and let us help you find out the rest."

"I owe it to you to tell you everything, Lord knows!" replied the girl. "I was in a tight place back in Oveja and you two got me out of it by risking your lives for me. I owe you both something I never can repay. But to-night it's better that I work alone. I'm not certain of anything yet. I'll meet you to-morrow, and if I find out to-night what I expect to, I'll have information on those rustled cattle for you. Can you meet me to-morrow morning near that burned-over hill right above the railroad tunnel—you know the place?

"Be there—let me see—say at ten o'clock. You'll have to trust me to meet you. Do not think I am not grateful to you two for what you did to-night. I will do everything I can do to help you find your cattle. But this Falk—you do not know who he is?"

"Who is he?" demanded Bill.

"That I will tell you to-morrow—maybe—" Then she was gone, riding away toward the northwest. Barry and Zephyr Bill had to let her go.

"I don't like thet 'mebbe' stuff of her'n," said Bill disgustedly. "Can't place no dependence in thet gal a-tall. Whar's she ridin' tuh now, I wonder?"

"Why didn't you ask her, Bill?" said Barry. "I thought you knew all about women. Well, Bill, let's go back to Oveja and trail these hombres of Falk's. Might do well to find out where those strangers are hanging out, anyway. There's nothing to do about the girl until we see her to-morrow."

"Ef she'll be thar," said Zephyr Bill with doubt in his tone. "I ain't keen f'r people thet says 'mebbe.' She's got me plumb buffaloed."

Barry and Zephyr Bill, as they started to return to Oveja, became aware of a band of men riding northwest out from Oveja. They were some ten in number, part of Falk's gang obviously. Barry and Zephyr Bill trailed them.

The group ahead rode steadily along the deep-rutted wagon road until they reached Horse-Thief Mesa. This the party climbed and continued on the trail across the sheep ranch to Don Mike Montelejon's house. There they calmly put their horses in a corral and went into the house. The whole crew apparently went to bed there, for all lights went out on the ranch soon after.

This disappointed Barry and Bill. Barry and Bill had hoped to get close enough to overhear some of the talk of the men. Usually such gangs did not go to bed at an early hour. This gang, however, seemed ruled by an iron discipline.

"I think we ought tuh go an' git the boys

an' mop up on thet bunch jest on general principles," said Zephyr Bill.

"That wouldn't find our cattle for us, old-timer," said Barry. "No, we'd better see Gyp Macklin to-morrow. I believe that girl has stumbled on something, but she doesn't want to spill it to us until she knows for sure."

CHAPTER XVI

"Trouble's Canned Tomaters T' Me!"

BARRY PINGER and Zephyr Bill Badger made camp on a timbered slope some distance from Don Mike's ranch house and kept watch on the place, one watching while the other slept.

Morning came and the men on Don Mike's place arose at a late hour, but made no move to ride out.

There seemed nothing to be gained in staying and watching the ranch house. And when it came time for the two to ride to meet Gyp Macklin they broke camp.

Their horses were grazing a quarter mile below and Bill went to get them. Zephyr Bill's dun gelding was cagy, and played tag with old Bill in spite of hobbles. Bill was puffing when he finally brought the horses into camp.

"Dang it," he grumbled. I wisht I hed one of them horses them writer fellers tells about—one of them intelligent animiles thet comes when yuh whistles at 'em. Ef I whistles fer this danged tick-roost o' mine, he thinks it's a train whistle an' thet he's the engyne, an' the next stop's som'eres t'other side o' Texas. Punchers does certainly lead oncomfortable lives. Wish't I was a danged sheep nuss."

"Yes, you do!" Barry laughed. "If you had a million dollars you'd still be cracking daylight with a club with the rest of us fool buckaroos."

Zephyr Bill tightened his cinch, the dun having blown himself up like a child's balloon in readiness for this daily test of brute against man, his sagacious head turned to watch his master. Bill ostentatiously fumbled as though tying the latigo, then suddenly heaved and the cinch tightened a good three inches.

"Fooled yuh thet time, old settler," chuckled Bill. "Yes, Barry, I guess yuh're right. Old Bill knows too much about hosses an' cows. It'd be a ruinashun and a shame t' lose a feller like me off'n any cow range. Losin' me'd be a deesaster big as a drouth."

"You certainly do appreciate yourself, don't you?" Barry baited him, hoping to get a "rise" out of the old buckaroo.

"Nope," Bill stated confidently, "'tain't thet—I jest knows a good man when I sees one, thet's all! An' I shore sees one when I looks in the mirror, cowboy!"

They mounted and rode toward the railroad, heading toward the tunnel near which Gyp Macklin had promised to meet them. To avoid a climb through a gap on the open plateau, where their horses could be seen for miles, they circled under the rimrock. It was hard going here—heavy slide-rock covered with treacherous undergrowth in spots—and they were forced to dismount and lead their horses.

Zeyphr Bill grumbled at this walking stunt.

"A buckaroo afoot is as out o' place as a blue chip in the collection plate at church," he muttered.

"You'd better hang a monkey-wrench on the safety-valve of that bellow of yours, Bill," advised Barry. "We don't want any more trouble than we can avoid."

"Trouble's canned tomaters tuh me—canned tomaters and raw whiskey and I loves it," stated Bill. "Huh, they ought tuh change the name o' this mesa from Hoss-Thief Mesa tuh Cow-Thief Mesa."

"They used to rustle American horses across this country to the Border fifty years or more ago, they tell me," said Barry. "Now they've changed it to cattle. Bill, that keep-off order of Don Mike's ranch, given us by Falk, and the fact that that big bunch of men are still around, seems mighty strong evidence to me that Hank's cattle are still in here somewheres. Falk wants us to keep off Don Mike's ranch so we won't be around to see the cattle drive he's going to make to the Border."

"Thet's all right, so fer's she goes, son, but they've got tuh have the cattle t' make the drive with. Hell, we hunted this country over fer them cattle, didn't we? Yuh don't mean t' say Hank Caldwell's steers is

still in yere somewhar? Hell, thet don't make sense, cowboy!

"And I ain't fergettin' about Jerkline Buford haulin' out a lot o' hay, either," went on Zephyr Bill. "Dang it, Barry, whar could they hide them steers all this time? Take me, Barry, why I could jest smell out thet many steers ef they was anywhar in forty mile o' me. But thet lady friend o' your'n will let us intuh the secret," Bill said with sarcasm. "She'll produce them steers right out o' her apron! An' while we're on the subjeck, I'm layin' seven tuh four thet she don't show up this mawnin'! Yuh hadn't ought tuh let her git away last night, Barry!"

"I'll take your bet that she doesn't show up," returned Barry. "The girl is all right, Bill—"

"Yuh wouldn't say thet if she was pockmarked an' hed a wooden laig, I bet yuh. Nope, kid," said Bill earnestly, "yuh're shore blind. Shucks, we're yere tuh the place she said an' we ain't seen her yet. We won't see her to-day neither, I'm tellin'—"

There was a slight rustling in a clump of juniper fifty yards north along the scarp of the plateau rim. Zephyr Bill had one of his Bisley revolvers trained on the spot in the fractional part of a second.

"Don't shoot, Mister Davy Crockett!" called the voice of Gyp Macklin. "I'm like the coon—I'll come right down."

Gyp stepped from her juniper screen, leading her horse. She was dressed in a neutral-tinted, gray-green, whipcord short skirt, sensible coat, heavy boots and a soft slouch Stetson. And she was a picture that made even the suspicious eye of old Bill light up.

"Good morning, gentlemen," she called.

"Good morning," said Barry. "Where the dickens did you get the duds?"

"Oh, I have a camp up here, in a homesteader's deserted cabin."

"You're camping in this country alone!" exclaimed Barry.

"Yes, alone, except for a couple of rattlers, a few spiders and a flock of centipedes," replied the girl, airily.

"I haven't persuaded them all to move out yet."

"Yuh're shore a queer kid!" Zephyr Bill shook his shaggy head at her. "Why cain't yuh come clean with us, gal?"

"I can now," she said. "I couldn't before, because I didn't have anything definite. Now I have."

They mounted and she led the way, away from the railroad, back in the general direction of Don Mike's ranch, although angling toward Razorback Ridge, where the tracks of both herds had been lost.

"I suppose," she told them as they rode together, "that you've wondered what the dickens I'm doing in a country like this alone. Well, I've been working to get the goods on somebody." Her face went bleak, hard. "Working to get that hombre that ordered old Galvez to kidnap me yesterday—Jim Falk! I'd be complimented to think Falk wanted to kidnap me for my looks, but I guess mainly it was because he knew I'd been watching him and his gang here on Horse-Thief Mesa and he thought I knew too much. You see, I happen to be working for our Uncle Sammy, and I came in here to keep my eyes on a notorious Border crook, smuggler of opium, Chinks, and anything worth while, and in between times, head of a bandit gang below the Border."

"Gosh, who's all thet?" demanded Zephyr Bill. "He must be a slick one—thet guy! Whar is he at, gal? Give me one crack at him and I'll bring him in f'r yuh." Zephyr Bill showed a tendency to go out "atter his skelp" at once.

Gyp Macklin grinned impishly at Zephyr Bill. "You ought to know where he's at, cowboy," she told him. "You've had a lot of chances to take a crack at him already! That crook, badman, bandit and smuggler is none other than Jim Falk, who's been acting as foreman of Don Mike's sheep ranch!"

CHAPTER XVII

"Now You See 'Em; Now You Don't!"

ZEPHYR BILL'S jaw dropped. "Th' hell he is! If I knowed thet, I'd 'a' hamburger'd him an' collected th' bounty on his skelp long ago!"

"Huh! I've got it now!" said Barry suddenly. "Smuggler, eh! I remember now where I saw Falk before! Five years ago I was hunting strays down along the Line

when I ran into a lively scrap one morning between a Border patrol and three or four men running dope across the Line. I helped the patrol round 'em up and the hombre in charge of the outlaw gang was Jim Falk, only he wore a beard then. No wonder he was afraid I'd recognize him up here."

"Kee-rect," said Gyp Macklin, laconically. "He didn't serve time, though; he escaped to Mexico and disappeared. We just heard lately he was operating above the Line again, and we've been trying to get him."

"And so you're working for the Government, helping run down desperadoes!" said Barry wonderingly.

"I'm not supposed to do much running down," said the girl; "this kind of work is an unusual stunt for me. You must think me loco for camping and riding around alone."

"I think you're one nervy person, Miss Macklin," said Barry earnestly. "Why, good Lord, if Falk knew you had something on him, and he had you in his power—"

"I would simply have disappeared," said the girl. "Or if he hadn't killed me I would have killed myself rather than stay prisoner to that renegade." The girl's eyes flashed.

"And he's been in cahoots with old Galvez to steal Caldwell's cattle?" questioned Barry.

The girl nodded. "I was only guessing that before yesterday, but now I know. I've been paying a Mexican servant girl in Don Mike's house to give me information. Falk was to furnish the men—he brought up his gang from below the Border—to do the stealing. Galvez compelled Don Mike to make Falk foreman of the ranch here. Galvez could force Don Mike to do that because he had Don Mike sewed up in mortgages and notes. I think Don Mike is innocent in the whole affair—ignorant to what's been going on.

"When he began to suspect, Falk shot him in Oveja and laid the blame on you two. Being Don Mike's foreman gave Falk a free hand with running the cattle on to Don Mike's ranch and having sheep bands ready to help blot out tracks. Falk was to get the cattle he stole as his share of the deal, and Galvez expected to get hold of the Caldwell ranch cheap."

"But how in the devil did they steal those cattle?" asked Berry. "Where are they now? Are they still on Horse-Thief Mesa or across the Border?"

"I'll show you. And keep your eyes peeled for ambushers. Falk's got guards posted around here." She led the way, riding straight across the plateau toward the rim overlooking the valley and tangle of canyons below the big mesa.

"S-s-st!" The girl had reined in her horse behind a clump of bushes which they could just peer over by standing on their stirrups. Two horsemen a mile away were cantering over the bench below them. Gyp Macklin, Barry and Zephyr Bill watched the two come nearer and nearer until they turned finally down into a canyon. Then the horsemen went behind a mott of timber along the side of the canyon—and—that was all. Barry was looking with his binoculars. He and Zephyr Bill waited impatiently for them to reappear. Getting tired at last, Barry glanced at the girl and saw a smile dancing in her eyes.

"Just like that!" she told them. "Now you see 'em; now you don't! They aren't hidden in that timber clump, I can assure you of that. Where are they? Some sleight-of-hand performance, isn't it?" Miss Macklin was as well pleased as a boy with a new toy.

"What!" Zephyr Bill said wonderingly. "Mean to say them hombres 'vaporated jest like them steers! Whar'n hell did they go at?"

"Where your steers went," Gyp stated ambiguously.

"And you mean you're sure Hank Caldwell's stolen cattle are still in this country?" asked Barry.

"Yes," she said, "they're still here."

"How th' devil kin they be yere when we cain't see 'em?" demanded Zephyr Bill.

"A story trickled into official ears on the Border a while back," said Gyp Macklin. "A story about a hiding place big enough to hold any number of men and horses and so well hidden that the devil himself couldn't find the place. This hiding place, so the story went, was large enough to hold even a big herd of stolen cattle for days at a time."

"But, dang it, them cattle ain't yere," insisted Zephyr Bill. "Cowboys from our ranch has been all over this danged Hoss-Thief Mesa."

"*Over* it, yes, Bill," said Gyp Macklin. "But did you ever go under it? Come, let's be jogging."

They had to ride in a roundabout way, keeping within a screen of timber whenever possible, to get down to the bench below. Zephyr Bill and Barry got their rifles from their scabbards to be prepared to deal with any of Falk's guards.

Far beneath the rim of the canyon they came to, they could see a small oval park, formed and surrounded on three sides by declivitous slide-rock. Here it was that the two horsemen had disappeared so mysteriously some minutes before.

There was the rending cra-a-a-ck of a rifle, and a bullet plowed through Zephyr Bill's calf-skin vest, the shot coming from above, from the canyon rim opposite. The eagle eyes of Bill detected a wisp of smoke above a clump of brush, and Bill jerked out the rifle and drove a bullet into the clump, the distance being about three hundred yards. The stooped figure of a man dislodged itself from the cedars and quartered toward the point above. He had some seventy feet to go to safe cover.

"Watch this, cowboy," Bill told Barry. He ostentatiously blew an imaginary speck of dust from the rear sight, pulled up a shirt sleeve, boredly raised the forty-five-seventy Winchester and fired. The "target" went head over heels backward, tumbled down the hillside and disappeared in a clump of timber.

Bill blew out the smoke, casually worked the lever again, lowered the hammer of the gun, and spoke.

"Three hundred yards. Jest p'int-blank range to old Bill. Me, I dunno whut th' hell they puts rings around no bull's-eyes fer. I shoots in the black only."

"Get back into cover, you old blow-hard," Barry ordered him. "There might be more of them around here."

"Nope. They'd 'a' shot already," Bill said. "Thet thar feller's jest a lookout, put yere tuh discourage anybody huntin' roundabout. But I onravels him too quick, onless thar's more of them sneakin' coyotes hear them shots and drifts our way. Now, Miss Macklin, marm, whut the hell become of them two riders whut disappeared a while ago?"

"You see that water?" Gyp indicated a small stream flowing out of the amphitheatre far below them.

"Shore—big spring there, I reckon."

"No. That water flows from what the Mexicans call the 'Cave of the Diamonds.' That's the hiding place of the story we heard down on the Border. Lots of pretty rock in there, I guess, which is why it's called the 'Cave of the Diamonds.' That cave will hold a thousand head of cattle, I reckon. Anyway, cowboys, there's where you will find your cattle, I think. I thought Falk might be mixed up in some smuggling, and I guess I was wrong. It's just plain cattle stealing this time."

"Yeah?" said Zephyr Bill skeptically. "Well, ef we do find them steers down thar, old Bill is goin' tuh have his head examined, I'm goin' plumb loco."

"Seeing's believing," said Gyp Macklin.

"All right, sister," said Bill, pretending to believe the girl's explanation. "Let's go swamp up thet cave and git the cattle and mosey on tuh Caldwell's. We wasted enough time on them rustlers."

"Don't be in a hurry," cautioned Gyp Macklin. "It's broad daylight and there's always men there. Better wait till evening. You see we've already been shot at when we're still a long ways off."

"Wut th' hell do I keer for bullets—it's all in a day's work fer a buckaroo," stated Zephyr Bill. "I craves more action like we hed at Oveja, an' I wants it rough an' often, thet's me, Bill Badger!"

"I guess you'll get it all right, fire-eater," Gyp said with a little smile. "But there's no hurry about going into that cave. I could stand some grub first myself."

They withdrew to a clearing, back a little ways from the canyon rim, and screened by dense brush. Between the three they raked up enough chuck for a lunch, washing it down with cold water. A camp fire might have attracted unwelcome attention.

"Water!" Bill remarked in disgust, as he drank from a canteen. "Water's fine fer

keepin' hosses' hoofs soft and fillin' oceans, but 'twarn't never meant fer me tuh drink, not none! On'y thing I hates about thet palacio burnin' up was all thet whiskey of Galvez feedin' them flames, dang it."

Barry turned to the girl who was gazing out across the country.

Northwest rose smoke from the ranch of Don Mike's sheep ranch. Below them was Razorback Ridge feathering into the desert at its lower end.

If Gyp Macklin was not mistaken about the cave the mystery of the vanishing herds was explained now. The cave was within easy driving distance of both places where the herds had been stolen. Once hidden in a secret cave, the steers could be held indefinitely there while being fed the hay that had been hauled out by Jerkline Buford, and doubtless packed by mules to the cave. The cattle would be held in the cave until such time as the hue and cry died down so that they could be secretly driven south across the Border.

And the plan would have gone through without a hitch if Gyp Macklin had not come into the country with information about the cave and had she not done enough sleuthing to find out its location. The existence of the cave would have remained altogether unknown to the cattlemen, at least for a time sufficient to have allowed Falk to get the Caldwell cattle across the Border.

"Wouldn't it be better for you to stay here, Miss Macklin?" Barry asked her, when, with the sun swinging low in the west, they decided to move. "Bill and I will go down and see if there really is a cave and whether it's full of diamonds, cattle or just bats."

"Nope," said the girl. "I'm not afraid. Most of Falk's men are over at Don Mike's ranch yet, I think, and we oughtn't to have any trouble getting out if they find us. Besides, I'm not quitting just when this is getting interesting. Come on, let's travel."

They tied their horses in a clump of young pine and went down afoot. Riding down with Falk's guards about was too risky. A half hour later they had climbed down to the bench at the edge of the sunken place in the canyon, near which lay the entrance to the cave. Even in the approximate locality, they could not find any sign of an entrance.

"You see that big dead tree lying back against the cliff between those two piñons?" said Gyp Maclin. "That's where it is, so the girl working at Don Mike's ranch told me. She got information from one of Falk's men, and it ought to be correct."

They sat and waited for some sign to indicate that a cave really existed near the spot. Nothing happened for a half hour. Barry grew skeptical of the whole affair. There was no cave. It was only wild talk. It was impossible. Then suddenly two horsemen appeared from behind the dead tree, and clattered over the rocks down the canyon.

"Seems tuh me I heard steers bellerin', too," Zephyr Bill whispered, wonder in his voice. "Mebbe thar *is* cattle in thet hill."

The two horsemen rode off down the canyon and the three looked at one another. There was a cave! Men do not ride out of cliffs.

Zephyr Bill drew one of his mammoth pieces of ordnance. "Let's go," he snapped. "If thar's a cave, I craves tuh explore it."

"Just a minute," said Barry; "we'll go just far enough to see if the cattle are in there and we'll stay just long enough to size things up a little. Bill, one of us might get potted in there, or we might get separated and get lost. If we do, the other one's got to ride and tell Hank and the boys. We're working for him, Bill, and we can't take any chances on letting these skunks get away with the cattle if they're down here. They might make the drive over the Border any night now. One of us has simply got to ride to notify Hank."

"All right," agreed Bill. "Soon's we find out something definite, we rides, either singly or together. But nothing'll happen to me. I feel equal tuh 'bout twenty rustlers alone."

CHAPTER XVIII

Zephyr Bill Runs from a Fight!

ZEPHYR BILL snaked his gangling length among the rocks, making toward the dead tree. Pinger and the girl crawled after him. They used all caution, fearing that guards might be near the cave entrance.

They pushed under the dead tree and found a great, irregular-shaped cleft in the rock wall behind, one which would take a close search to find and, which having once found, one would guess to be only one of a million other holes in a canyon side made by chunks of rock splitting off from the main mass. One would never dream, looking at the cleft casually, that it connected with a cave.

The cleft was some seven feet high by ten feet wide, overhung with craggy weathered limestone, and almost hidden by trees that grew in the scanty soil formed between the rocks. Four or five feet farther into the hill the cleft narrowed, and here they could see a rough door of heavy planking, into which a small door, hinged with rawhide, had been set.

Zephyr Bill went ahead and pushed tentatively at the small door. It gave readily, and he stepped inside and closed it after him. In a moment the door opened a crack, and he beckoned to Barry and Gyp Macklin. They hastened to join him and closed the door behind them.

The change from the not very strong light of the approaching dark outdoors to the pitch darkness within was startling. Their eyes could see nothing, but they could now hear distinctly the bellowing of cattle echoing and re-echoing in a booming undertone of sound in some great chamber ahead. Above the sound came the tinkling of falling water. The air was stifling with the reek of sweating cattle penned in a small closed space.

"Grab a-holt and follow me!" whispered Zephyr Bill, who insisted on taking the leadership in the venture. Barry grabbed one finger of Bill's immense ham of a paw with one hand, and took the firm little hand of Gyp Macklin with the other. They sidled along the entrance passageway, making for the spot from which the bellowing of the cattle came.

A light suddenly flashed ahead of them, and they pressed against the side wall of the cave. A doorway had been opened or a curtain lifted up, and a few yellowish rays of light feebly illuminated the main chamber of the cave ahead of them. The sight was eerie, unreal, as from a world of nightmare.

Directly in front of them, held in by a rope barrier, was a herd of steers. The light ahead fell on the eyes of the cattle, which shone blue and unearthly. The bellowing herd stirred up the dust until the air was thick and they kept up a continuous din of bawling.

The light also revealed roughly the make-up of the cave. The roof of the cave mounted to the height of a cathedral in some places and to only a few feet in others. Its walls ran in irregular lines; the size rather disappointing—smaller than the three had expected to find. A million facets of calcite in walls and ceiling reflected the light on a bewildering array of strange stalactite shapes of grandeur and immensity. These would be the "diamonds" of the Mexican tradition of which Gyp Macklin had spoken.

Three men, leading horses, had appeared up ahead for an instant as they were outlined by the light which shone back and to the right of the penned-in steers. Then the light was extinguished so far as Zephyr, Gyp and Barry were concerned. A door had been shut evidently. The horsemen were coming toward the entrance, their horses' shod hoofs ringing strangely on the rocky floor. The men were evidently so familiar with the cave that they needed no light to find the entrance.

The three would pass close to the three intruders caught midway between main chamber and entrance. Barry pressed the girl's hand to reassure her. They would have gone undiscovered had not one of the men, for no reason whatever, suddenly stumbled over a depression in the floor and fallen far over against the wall, brushing up against Gyp.

He got out one word of surprise before Barry's hands closed on his throat; that and the scuffle of feet gave the other two the alarm. These two ran toward the entrance. A revolver, shot off by one of the two, roared with a deafening reverberation in the cave. Barry, still struggling with the man he had by the throat, loosed the grip of one hand and brought up his six-shooter and whacked his captive over the head just as Zephyr Bill came to his aid.

To stay in the passageway would be dangerous; they were certain to be found there. To try to make the entrance where the other

two men had gone would expose them to shots from the two men who had run to the big door—and shots, so long as the girl was with them, were not to be chanced unless it was absolutely necessary.

The best thing, both Barry and Zephyr Bill agreed without any words, was to remain in the cave. Then if they found there were not more than three or four men in the cave, they could put up a fight and seize the cattle. If there were too many men they could hide and wait a chance to get out again.

The three ran across and ducked under the ropes retaining the steers—the animals had huddled back in terror at the shots. Barry and the girl ran behind a monstrous stalagmite as big as the body of an elephant.

As Zephyr Bill went through the ropes, he stopped to draw his knife and slash the strands, loosing the Lazy H-C steers in the cave! "Go git 'em, little doggies," Bill muttered. "Tromp 'em, yuh mavericks!"

Again the light at the back of the cave flashed on and men appeared in the curtained doorway of a room. A scattering volley from half a dozen guns was fired at the darting figures. Lead slugs whistled like hornets about the head of Zephyr Bill, and thudded into the soft calcite walls, sending down showers of white powder.

Bill slammed back two bullets into the group of men massed near the light, and from the big stalagmite Barry also fired. The light was immediately extinguished. Shots were sent toward the three in the darkness. Zephyr Bill cut loose into the steers near where the shots came from and the herd suddenly stampeded.

Bill dodged a couple of steers coming his way, reloaded his guns and hastened to rejoin Gyp Macklin and Barry Pinger. That is, he attempted to rejoin them. But fate and a drove of "ball-faced" Herefords crashing at Zephyr Bill decreed otherwise. The steers, panic-stricken, brushed aside Bill like he was a baby. The next thing Zephyr Bill Badger knew he was in the path of the whole herd breaking for the entrance. There was a sudden crash up ahead as the planks of the entrance gate gave way.

Zephyr Bill did the only thing he could do—to save himself from being made mince meat under the tramping hoofs—grabbed the neck of a big steer. A few seconds later he found himself outside the cave in the calm of the evening with a death grip around the neck of a big red-and-white steer, going somewhere else and going fast.

He was a full fifty yards from the mouth of the cave before he managed to catch foot to ground and extricate himself without being trampled on. Even then he was in a fair way of being gored, as Mr. Steer was about fed up with caves, rustlers and short rations, and his temper was as red as his hair.

"Gosh dong it," Bill swore fervently, "ev'ry time I start tuh fight I git tangled up with a danged he-cow an' th' fight goes on without me! Yere I was r'arin' tuh mix with a few rustlers an' nothin' but beef ag'in beef happened. Gosh dang th' luck!"

The little half circle between him and the mouth of the cave was a solid mass of crazy cattle. Riders emerged from the cave to keep the animals from escaping to open country. Inside the cave there was a random shot or two. Zephyr Bill drew back into the brush and meditated.

He was separated from Gyp Macklin and Barry. If he went back into the cave, he had small chance of finding the two. Besides, if they should be separated he had promised Barry to ride to Hank Caldwell's to notify the old rancher of the cave and that the missing steers were in there.

Yes, he had promised Barry to do that one thing, and in spite of the fact that it meant turning his back on a desirable fight—he knew that he must do it at once.

He listened, but he could hear no further shots within the cave. That would seem to indicate that Barry and the girl had managed to hide themselves. An idea came to Zephyr Bill, one that would help Barry. The rustlers did not know how many people had come into the cave. If Zephyr Bill was seen escaping, they would probably guess that there was only one and that person had gotten away. The search in the cave, if one was being carried on, would be dropped.

Therefore, Zephyr Bill, after he had climbed halfway up the side of the canyon toward the place where the horses had been left, raised a defiant shout and emptied one

of his Bisley revolvers at the riders holding the cattle in front of the cave entrance.

A couple of rustlers immediately gave chase, but Bill, in the falling darkness, had no trouble evading them. Below him, as he gained the top of the canyon, he could see the steers being held in front of the cave. Bill hesitated. That might mean that the drive for the Border would start immediately. Caldwell and his men must be summoned at once. Yet he hesitated to leave the spot. There was a possibility that Barry might be in trouble.

"Gawd, I'm glad nobody cain't see this yere," he muttered thankfully as he started out finally to get his horse. "Zephyr Bill Badger a-crawlin' off intuh the bresh out'n the firin' zone! Druther be killed than t' do it, but I promised Barry. Them thiefs 'll undoubtedly drive off them steers to-night. I'll git Hank and the boys and I comes back hell-bent, root hawg or die!"

He stalked off toward his horse, bow-legged and awkward in his spurs and high-heeled boots, muttering angrily to himself—Zephyr Bill in retreat.

CHAPTER XIX

Hide and Seek

WHILE Bill had been riding a steer out of the cave, Barry and Gyp Macklin had reached the partial protection of a sequence of pillars extending from the floor to the low roof. In a narrow niche between two of these they crouched to avoid the trampling hoofs of the maddened cattle as well as any stray bullets which might have their names written on the lead.

The cave was a madman's dream of some dark corner of hell by this time—bellowing, milling steers—from the noise they made their number seemed to be half a million—pitch-black darkness so thick it seemed to impinge on the eyes with the force of a physical pressure, and rancid damp dust rising in thick clouds from the floor.

Added to this had been the roar of the revolvers; the blood-red stabs of their flames had been like meteors seen through the smoke of a forest fire. Shots, yells, bawling cattle and the pound of hoofs—their ears ached with the terrible confusion of sound.

To get away from the rush of the fear-maddened steers Barry lifted Gyp Macklin to a shelf a little higher than the cave floor. While doing this he was nearly swept beneath a wave from the surging, bellowing sea of cattle. The huge bulk of a plunging steer brushed against him and would have knocked him under the hoofs of the herd had not Gyp caught him by the arm. Exerting all her strength, the girl helped him up on to the shelf with her.

The shots stopped abruptly. A little rush of fresher air came, and he knew the big herd in the cave had broken the gate and that air was coming into the cavern. The dust became thicker. At the entrance they could see faintly the cattle rushing onward in their mad flight to the outdoors. Miraculously the entrance did not become blocked by bodies of fallen cattle and the steers continued to pour out of the cave.

Barry held his belt gun fully loaded, but to fire would have been a most idiotic means of betraying their position. There was no means of telling whether they were still being hunted for or whether the rustlers had given up the search. Barry had hopes that he and the girl could make it to the entrance and get out safely.

As comparative quiet came, they heard the bark of orders in a voice that could belong to but one man in the world—Jim Falk, rustler, crook, smuggler, bandit extraordinary.

Behind Barry and Gyp Macklin came an annoying tinkling drip-drip of water falling into a pool behind them and deeper within the cave. Outside of this there was no noise except a spur attached to some boot moving occasionally over the floor of the cavern.

After the noise of bellowing cattle and confusion, the calm seemed now unnatural, filled with vague threats of danger. The two could only wait, while water dripped slowly and the dust slowly settled.

They heard a slight rustling on the rock floor near them; someone in stocking feet evidently was creeping along the walls searching out whoever was hidden in the cave. Barry hastily put the girl behind him, and hoped that the man feeling his way in the dark was small in size.

He was. Groping fingers touched Barry's

shirt front. The man's fingers transmitted their discovery and the man started to cry out. Barry, his hands already open to fasten on the man's throat, thumbs close together, palms outward, lunged forward. The man's cry was choked off into a gutteral croak.

The man was small enough for Barry to handle easily, although the fellow kicked out viciously until Barry smashed the man's head back against a rock pillar. The blow stunned the man and he sank at their feet. Barry released his hold, and with revolver ready stood waiting further attack.

On the sound of the cry the man had given—even faint as it was—some nervous bandit had fired a shot which reverberated in the cave until it sounded like a cannon.

"Stop!" shouted Falk in Mexican, from out of the darkness. "Fools! Mules! Come here! You Ortiz and White, watch the door. Shoot anybody trying to pass out. The rest come here."

Barry decided there was but one possible escape—to retreat still farther into the cave. Discovery here in this chamber, in spite of its large size, was inevitable. Falk seemed to have a goodly part of his band of men with him. But these caves often led off for miles through an endless series of chambers and passageways. If so, he and the girl could hide from an entire army.

"I don't know," said Gyp when Barry asked her in a whisper if this were true of this cave. "All I know is this wild yarn we heard of the 'Cave of the Diamonds.' How big it is the Lord only knows. I doubt if anybody else does."

They moved cautiously along the wall, feeling for some passageway leading out of the main chamber. They had not gone fifteen feet when a flicker of light sprang up in a central spot in the cave, and this was succeeded an instant later by a sudden leap of flame. Falk had had a pile of hay carried into the middle of the chamber, soaked it in kerosene evidently, and lit it, intending the flames to reveal the hiding place of the intruders. As the flames leaped higher, the cave's walls began to be revealed in all their glittering beauty. Barry and Gyp had no time, however, to admire them.

Desperately they sought to creep into another niche where the light would not reach them, but they were too late. They had been seen. Men were running toward them. The revolver in Barry's hand barked once at the attackers, but some one leaped at him from the back, fastening arms and twining legs about his body in an effort to bring him down. Three or four others were coming at him from the front. He sought to rid himself of the man on his back, but the time was too short. They were all on top of him, and he crashed to the rock floor.

The cowboy struggled desperately to free his right hand so that he could use his six-shooter, but the weight of the men on top of him was too great. Arms and legs were pinioned.

Above him he heard Gyp scream and heard the "pop" of her small-calibre gun; then he saw her struggling in the grip of Falk and a swart Mexican.

Hopelessly outnumbered, he felt himself bound with half-hitches of hair rope, arms tied behind his back by the successive loops. He had presence of mind left to hold his elbows as far out as possible, to flex his body as a hooked trout curls, and to stiffen the abdominal muscles, made hard as steel bands by a life of long days in the saddle and branding pen.

"And that will be that," remarked Falk. He grunted an order in Mexican and strode toward the back of the cave.

The bandits dragged the girl and Pinger after Falk as though they had been bags of corn, taking them into a smaller cave off the main one, which formed the living quarters for whoever was in the cave.

At a sign from Falk, the men withdrew, leaving Barry and the girl alone with the leader of the rustlers. A heap of dirty blankets was the only furniture in the "room"; a single candle produced light. A couple of saddles and bridles lay about the floor. Falk's gaudy chaps lay in one corner.

Falk played with his six-shooter, expertly revolving it on his finger, toying lovingly with the weapon.

"Well, I told you I would get you, damn you, Pinger! So you thought you'd butt into my place and raise hell, did you! And you, too, Gyp, my little friend, the lady spy. You know what we used to do with spies in Mexico? And what we did with good-look-

ing women? Well, it's a mixture of both for you. And a dose of lead in the guts of your cowboy friend at the very least. If I've got the time, I'll make his dying more interesting than that for him—and me."

"Oh, go to hell," said Barry. "Are you trying to scare us? Start your show, you renegade."

Falk went black as a Jamaican negro. "Oh, no, we do not start the show now," he said, smiling wickedly. "There's no hurry. We've got you two safe and before I leave to go back to Mexico we'll have our show, don't worry. I'll take you across the line, Gyp, if you're a good little girl. But you, Barry, you're staying—with this nice big cave for your tomb. I'm glad you two dropped in."

Evidently they hadn't got Zephyr Bill then, Barry thought to himself, if Falk thought only two people had dropped in. That meant Bill would have help there by morning at the latest.

"I told you and Galvez I'd get you both," said Barry. "And I will yet."

"Bah!" said Falk. "Sweet chance you've got getting me. But you got Galvez, all right, last night. He died from your shot this morning. However, I would have killed the crook myself; you only saved me the bother. I did all the work of this affair and took all the risk and he wanted to hog the profits."

Falk was chatting with them as unconcernedly as he would have discussed the weather. The big fellow was dressed in his best outfit of clothes; he looked quite now like the typical moving picture bandit leader —gold and silver ornaments and a serape over his shoulders; Falk was not an unattractive-looking fellow, tall, straight.

A whistle sounded outside, and Falk poked his head between the sack curtains which made the "door" of the little "room." Some one spoke to Falk in Mexican, the words coming in a rush between panting breaths. Barry listened intently, understanding the Mexican readily, of course.

"What the devil do you want!" Falk had snapped when he stuck his head out.

"He got away! A giant with a beard. He climbed to the top of the canyon."

"Then he was with these two, and he knows of the cave!" said Falk. He swore. "Had you no rifles with you, idiot?"

"It was too dark. Both of us missed."

"Hell!" Falk exclaimed. "Damn you and your missing. Why can't you fool Mexicans learn to shoot? I wouldn't have missed! Saddle my horse! The drive for Priest Pass and the Border starts right now, savvy? We'll have to move along at top speed too. We've simply got to kill those steers to get them over the line. You, Juan, will be in charge of the drive. I'll give you three men. The rest of us will help you drive 'em up to Priest Pass. Once we've got 'em off of Horse-Thief Mesa, you fellows twist their tails all the way to the Line. The rest of us will stay to keep these cattlemen back. We'll hold them until you make the Border, if you hurry! Move! Get my horse!"

He turned again to the girl and Barry, dropping into English. "Good-by, my dear friends," he said lightly. "I'll be back tonight sometime. Ortiz," he shouted again and a Mexican jumped into the doorway. "You're guarding here in the cave. You and old Spence. Have some grub ready for us when we get back. We'll be here again in a few hours. My horse! Where in hell is that horse? Get him out!"

Falk rushed from the "room" and a little later there came to Barry's and Gyp's ears the sound of shod hoofs clattering over the floor of the cave toward the entrance. The drive toward the Border was on!

(To be concluded in the next issue)

A GET-TOGETHER DEPARTMENT FOR GENERAL SERVICE TO OUR READERS

Conducted by The Storekeeper

THE BARGAIN COUNTER

If you want to exchange something you have, but don't want, for something you want that someone else has, here is the place to do it. It must be understood that ACE-HIGH *cannot be held responsible for losses sustained by our readers.*

Announcements inserted free of charge, but they must not exceed 21 *words inclusive of name and address, and must be either typed or hand-printed. Nothing but BONA FIDE trades acceptable; announcements of articles for sale will be ignored. State both what you have and what you want. Study examples of announcements in this issue for the proper way to draft yours.*

Will trade some old copies of magazines dealing with Western stories for interesting frontier poker anecdotes. C. F. Happel, 212 W. 85th St., New York City.

Have magazines, large collection foreign stamps. Want musical instruments. Irving Sorocki, 45 Bay, 20th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have stock saddle, fountain pen, onyx ring, .22 Winchester rifle. Want 3-tube radio, baseball suit and glove. H. Wilson, Wills Pt., Texas.

Mandolin with case, lessons, skates, mounted deer head, incubator. Want riding equipment, banjo, Colt revolver. V. Ellis, 405 S. 8th St., Livingston, Montana.

Have 200 magazines, books by Zane Grey. Want 1913 Liberty head nickle. Fred Hill, 724 W. 7th St., Oklahoma City, Okla.

Mexican horsehair belt, photos, souvenirs of the Alamo. 1,000 different stamp collection. What have you? Hardy Rowland, 534 Quitman St., San Antonio, Texas.

Trade typewriters for repeating rifles or shotguns. J. W. Randall, 155 W. Main St., Rochester, N. Y.

Auto knitter and yarns. Want guns. John Henderson, R. I., Henning, Minn.

Rare and valuable formulas. Want printing press, type, printer's material. What have you? Lowell A. Young, Fairfield, Ill.

Have 20 magazines, set of Boy Scout books, good battery motor with reverse. What have you? Thomas Gish, Pemberton, Ohio.

Have Brandes headphones and U. S. Army bayonet. Want Henley's "Book of Formulas." J. Van Rassen, 1530 W. Division St., South Bend, Ind.

Have .25 automatic revolver. Want white crested Polish chickens, .20 ga. shotgun, radio, police dog. Edward Gudermuth, Crescent, Mo.

Troupe of trained birds. Want bears, monkeys, ferrets, or other small animals. Frank Nelson, Box 53, Holliday, Kansas.

H. and A. rifle, bookkeeping course, baseball mask, magazines, books. Want firearms. What have you? Russell Catt, Kokomo, Ind.

Tear this slip off and mail it with your announcement—it entitles you to one *free* insertion in this Department. Announcements are limited to 21 words—trades only—no others considered. Announcements must be either typed or hand-printed.

Name .....

Street .....

City .....

(This expires May 3, 1926)

Magazines, set of Sax Rohmer, spotlight. Want 60-power telescope. Max Trubenbacker, 138 W. 126th St., New York City.

Magazines, books by Raine Tregory, Brand, Baxter, Seltzer, Mulford and others. Want books, dice, records. Alfred Watson, Viola, Iowa.

Have Hohner chromatic harp, radio hookups, log books, novels. Want Liederman course, telescope. What have you? J. Reiss, 416 Grand Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

Have movie machine, Liederman course, crystal set, spark coil, Chambers' encyclopedia, ice skates, watch, camera. Want .32 automatic. Elmer Larson, 100 44th Ave., M., Chicago, Ill.

Want radio sets, gun, revolvers, typewriter, printing presses. Have toys, violin, electric goods, spices, etc. E. Smith, Box 97, Paxinor, Pa.

Have 12-ga. single gun, hunting knife and case. Want revolver with holster. Everett Donachy, 709 Lincoln Ave., St. Mary's, Pa.

Have Redbone hound pup, 3 months old, female, registered. Want typewriter, radio or poultry. Wilford Johnson, R. I., Paducah, Ky.

Wanted: Spanish or Mexican newspapers, old or new. What do you wish? V. Marguerite Darrell, Waubay, South Dakota.

Want radio, carpenter's tools, land. Have mining stock, violin, money-making plans and trade secrets. A. Quenzer, 315 Barbey St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have old violin and guitar. Want .38 or .45 Colt revolver or automatic. Erwin Fuller, 233 E. Jefferson St., Ft. Wayne, Ind.

Have radio, Barrack lantern, first aid belt. Want old money, Indian relics, dagger, arrowheads. Frank Gable, Blytheville, Ark.

Radio, .25 automatic pistol, .22 single rifle, Stevens 12-ga. shotgun, banjo-uke. Want radio or typewriter. John Monka, Glastonbury, Conn.

Have rifle, fly rod, hunting knife, sheathe, bicycle lamp and magazines. Want .38 Colt special, Winchester carbine. Frank Young, 3510 Wallace, Philadelphia, Pa.

Wanted: Indian curios, beadwork, stone relics. What have you? Albert Heath, 444 E. 42nd St., Chicago, Ill.

Have all kinds of books and magazines. What have you? J. Donnelly, 1606 N. 21st St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Have .22 repeating rifle, crystal radio set. Want revolver, .38 preferred. Stephen Ksiazkiewicz, 25 Kappel Place, Rochester, N. Y.

Have .32 revolver, binoculars, reel, magazines. Want radio set or telescope. Samuel Ebright, Colby, Kansas.

Have fiction books, magazines, magic lantern, series assorted world pictures. Want pistol or business course. R. Isaacs, 334 W. 86th St., N. Y. City.

Have bums wrestling course. Want Bremer Tully three-circuit tuner. Cleo Leininger, Gilbert, Iowa.

Have radio, Iver-Johnson .32 revolver, set nine new steel shaft golf clubs. Want shot-guns, Kentucky rifle. C. Snavely, Hopkins, Minn.

Wanted: Views and facts on any topic. Have theory, idea, and view on all subjects. George Kay, Little Falls, Minn.

Want 20-ga. Winchester pump gun, good shape, auto knitter. Clarence Swan, Dewey, Okla.

Will swap first-class job printing for Crosley Pup radio complete. Herman Marshall, Thompson's Station, Tenn.

German police pups with pedigree, new Colt revolver. Want guns and tenor banjo. J. Van Cleaves, 16 Exchange St., Emporia, Kan.

Have magazines to trade for others. Ed. King, 640 N. O'Brien St., South Bend, Ind.

Swap Ansonia sunwatch, compass, pictures of Washington. Want camera, pictures. Pvt. Harry McEwan, 1800 C St.,N. W., Washington, D. C.

Little Leather Library. Want novels, magazines, story papers before 1911, boys' 5c. weeklies. A. Edgerton, 116 W. 6th Ave., Houston, Texas.

Have Stevens .22 rifle, .25 automatic and banjo-uke. Want .32, .38 revolver or shotgun. Paul Romff, 1932 Brookwood, Toledo, Ohio.

Have U. S. and foreign coins dating back to 13th century. Want Smith & Wesson or Colt. Peter Henderson, Littleton, W. Va.

Have Radiola, super-heterodyne loop, headphones. Want chickens. What have you? Kirk Minter, Grafton, W. Va.

Have an Iver-Johnson .38 nickeled six-inch barrel double action. Want rifle. Charles Kuncl, 1803 L St., West, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Trade guns, rabbit dogs. Want coon and skunk hound. Harry Duncan, Route No. 1, Salinerville, Ohio.

Exchange .38-.40 new service Colt, 7½ in. barrel, belt and holster for 3¼ x 5½ folding camera. D. Holden, Middlesex, Vt.

Have player organ with lots of rolls. Want professional tenor banjo and case. What have you? C. Gobbs, Peoria, Ill.

Have up-to-date café and filling station on hard road in good town. What have you? John Skinner, Marissa, Ill.

Want 8-power binoculars. Have Colt automatic, steel casting rod, reel. C. Weyrauch, 3004 W. North Ave., Baltimore, Md.

Want B. W. Cooke auto course. What do you want? Geo. Koechel, 1828 E. 35th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

Trade guns, camera, violin, tools, radio parts, numerous articles for old-time pistols and revolvers. Box 250, Angelo Camp, Calif.

Machinists tools, I.C.S. courses, set ladies' mink furs, sealskin coat. Want modern firearms. H. Taber, R. R., Kansas City, Mo.

Want Colt single action .32-.20 7½ in. barrel. Have small gas engine. R. Zaeller, R. R. 1, Reserve, Kan.

Have motion films; 100, 50, 35 ft. Want foreign stamps or sporting goods. M. Kaplan, 773 Willoughby Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want trapping partner, prospecting, hunting, British Columbia, one between ages 25 and 40 who likes game. F. Herrig, R. R. 1, Orin, Mich.

Have complete A-1 tube set mounted on panel and baseboard. Want nine-cylinder Gnome motor. Harold MacDonald, Vinyard Haven, Mass.

Trade A-1 Powers five-picture machine complete, 9 reels of film. Want C melody saxophone. G. Seibert, Box 58, Yeagerstown, Pa.

Have folding camera, flashlight, radio parts, uke, books, stamp collection. What have you? E. Blair, Jr., 139 Clinton Ave., New Haven, Conn.

Have .22 rifle, revolver, bugle, earphones, alarm clock. Want B flat cornet, repeating rifle. Herbert Fortier, 18 Jackson St., Worcester, Mass.

Trade photos of the Ozarks for those of other parts of the country. J. Beck, 702 N. Main St., Springfield, Mo.

Want Colt six-gun and holster. Trade radio parts or what you want, or cash. Stanley Runyon, Walnut Grove, Calif.

Trade radio coil business, over $1,000 worth radio coils. Want other business. Ora Davis, Sta. A, Clarksburg, W. Va.

Have large collection stamps, magazines. Want small dog, rabbit. What have you? M. Moskowitz, 303 Bradford, New York City.

Trade radio, 1,500 miles, for tubes or short wave receiver. Clyde Wood, Box 1943, Buena Vista, Fla.

Trade thoroughbred female Llewellyn setter, 2 years. Want 3-tube radio. What have you? K. Stratton, Wilmington, Ohio.

Have valuable automobile tool patent, never been on any market. Want anything equal value. T. Watson, 332 E. Line St., Tyler, Texas.

Want old-time novels and story papers. What do you want? Robert Smeltzer, 3432 N. Bodine St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Have cornet, near perfect, purchase value $50. Want .22 Colt target pistol, no automatics. F. Bates, Lewisville, Ark.

French field-glasses with imitation leather case. Want .22 revolver. What have you? Derzil Peyton, Turin, Iowa.

Radio parts, mandolin. Want sewing machine motor, rug loom, bulb A battery charger, beach property. F. Kirkpatrick, Lost Hills, Calif.

12-ga. Stevens double shotgun, radio sets, several parts. Want telescope, guns. R. Moen, Montevideo, Minn.

Want good Luger. Have Farmer Burns wrestling course and Strongfort health course. Frank A. Claws, 1215 Capitol St., Vallejo, Calif.

Have .40 cal. rifle, electric motor, 1-tube radio. Want small moviegraph. Marcus Erickson, Dale, Minn.

Marlin, Winchester, Ross repeaters, H. & A. single shot with silencer. Want auto bed, tent, Handee gun, kodak. Higle, Box 341, New England, N. Dak.

Radio tubes, music books, needle packages, razor hones. Press wanted. M. Bender, 665 Garden Ave., Olean, N. Y.

Have side car with tire, used Grant six parts. Want typewriter, radio, telescope. What have you? Andrew Schurhammer, Box 55, Kellogg, Minn.

Want to correspond with young lady, age 16 to 20 years. John Hof, South Egan Ave., Madison, South Dak.

Cigar bands, U. S. precancelled or revenue stamps. Want old guns, swords or pistols. Edward Dvorak, 4874 E. 106th St., Garfield Heights, Ohio.

40 fiction books, mounted birds, baseball mask, coins, guns. Trade for anything or guns. Perry Easley, Rapid City, Mich.

Typewriter, .32 revolver, accordion, and boxing gloves, for radio. Leslie Humphreys, 420 Wheeler Ave., Mankato, Minn.

Want police pups, bulldog, spitz or terrier pups. Have radio, camera, adding machine, boxing gloves, flashlight, ice skates. W. Molas, 4403 S. Wood St., Chicago, Ill.

Have radio sets and parts. Want magic apparatus, musical instruments, guns, any side show goods. Val. Burlingame, 715 7th Ave., Seattle, Wash.

Wanted: Cut hair 34 inches or longer, auburn, or good shade of golden or blond. What do you want? Fred Hauer, Route 7, Box 33A, Mt. Clemens, Mich.

Trade: .22 Winchester repeater, 12-ga. Spencer pump. Want .38 Colt, .30-.30 Winchester. What have you? Chet Anderson, Artesian, S. Dak.

A live racoon, must be young. Have headphones. What do you want? John Hale, 143 S. Stout Ave., Blackfoot, Idaho.

Wanted: Guns. Have fishing tackle, books, magazines, stamps, flashlights, man's wrist watch. Lyle Rogers, 121 N. Marion St., Ottumwa, Iowa.

Mounted cougar hide, 7.65 mm. Luger. Want guns. What have you? L. Dey, Box 217, Myrtle Point, Ore.

Trade records, precancels, magazines, six "Lone Scout" baseball. Want books, magazines, telescopes. M. Hitchcock, G. D., Wichita, Kansas.

Wanted: great Dane pups. Will trade for arms or other dogs. Must be full bloods. Willis Fanning, Golden City, Mo.

Album, 11 x 15, containing pictures of Hawaiian Islands. Want A-1 slide trombone and case. Charles Todd, 1062 60th St., Oakland, Calif.

Have .32 revolver, 7-jewel Elgin watch. Want Luger calibre revolver. A. Knuth, Moorhead, Minn.

Steber knitting machine, spurs, Liederman's and Strongfort's courses, boxing gloves, etc. Want radio, firearms, telescope. Clyde Stipe, Beebe, Ark.

Have Elgin railroad watch, 21 jewels, gold pencil. Want Victrola with records. Wilbur Johnson, Springfield, Ark.

Have complete process for making seamless sanitary flooring. Will exchange for mechanics tools. J. Toombs, Box 497, Prescott, Canada.

Winchester pump, Colt revolver, Savage repeater. Want high-powered rifles or revolvers. R. Robinson, Box 95, So. Chicago, Ill.

Bronze leather stamping outfit, letters and numerals, lady's ice skates, Davis double-barrel shotgun. Want anything useful. Geo. Dawson, Tuckerton, N. J.

Want Colt .38 automatic and Colt army special. Have kodak film tank, Flodial compass. H. Schmidt, 223 E. 4th St., Red Wing, Minn.

Magazines, novels. Want other reading. Send your list. Mrs. John Samms, Box 113, Avoca, Iowa.

Hawaiian steel guitar, 2¼ x 4¼ special lens folding camera, selective 5-tube radio. Want typewriter or other radio. W. Frazer, 4067 Oakland Crescent, Chicago, Ill.

Have Oriental crystal ball, found in India. What have you? Ken La Mela, 40 W. Broadway, Paterson, N. J.

1920 Cleveland motor-cycle, .22 Colt, 6-jewel Equity watch. What have you? F. Allen, 2836 Boston Ave., San Diego, Calif.

Pedigreed Boston terrier male pups, house broken. Want radio or high-power rifle. D. Hare, 825 E. 18th St., Erie, Penn.

Have Liederman exerciser, Duluth hockey shoes with nickel skates. Want shotgun, rifle, fishing outfit. Don Ayres, 807 S. Topeka, Wichita, Kan.

Have saxophone lessons and book, small music stand. What have you? John Moore, 1008 Baldwin St., Chester, Pa.

Have .32-.20 Colt swingout, tenor banjo. Want German police dog or Boston bull terrier. Joe Stephens, Box 382, New Albany, Ind.

Have American Legion Weeklies, four years straight, almost complete editions. What have you? Fred Carman, Northwood, N. D.

Trade six paper-bound legal advisors law books, good violin and case. Want .22 rifle, Hawaiian guitars. Willie Rux, Northwood, N. Dak.

Victrola and large collection of records. Want radio, 5-tube desired. John A. Anderson, R. 18, Brocton, N. Y.

Want correspondence courses and banjo-uke. What do you want? Can give information on Western ranch life. Chas. Hudson, Pecos, Texas.

Have novels. Want moving-picture machine in return. A-1 condition. John Locava, 210 S. Columbia Ave., Miners Mills, Pa.

Part airedale and collie pups, large white goose. Want typewriter, camera. R. Taggart, R. I., Williamsfield, Ohio.

Exchange postcards and correspondence with boys and girls, age 16 to 25 years. Robt. Whitney, 1046 N. Clinton, Decatur, Ill.

Have story book and camera. Want other books. Joe Crockett, R. 2, Wytheville, Va.

Have Canal Zone stamp coin catalogue. Want pool table about 3 ft. x 6 ft. Daniel Moran, 63 W. Haynes Ave., Corona, N. Y.

Have novels, magazines. Want serviceable rifles and revolvers. Joseph White, 91 Yale Ave., Hillside, N. J.

Have three sets of books and others. Want guns and camp articles. Earle Cook, 710 S. Washington Ave., Saginaw, Mich.

Trade Mannlicher-Schoenauer big-game rifle. Want 12-ga. hammerless shotgun. Sgt. Arthur Sweger, 83rd Field Artillery, Ft. Benning, Ga.

Have books, foreign stamps, coins, BB gun, cigar bands. Want boxing gloves, punching bag. Chas. Howath, 10305 Parkview Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

New .22 Reising automatic in factory box, extra clip, cleaning rod. Want Colts. B. Dack, 1865 N. Western Ave., Hollywood, Cal.

Have .41 army rifle, .44 cap and ball pistol, Winchester .22 rifle. Want heavy stock saddle. Ernest Shaw, 77 E. High, Avon, Mass.

Have new headphones, lantern slides, film, books, etc. Want boxing gloves, punching bag. Jacob Zonderwyck, 2818 Ormes St., Phila., Pa.

Trade 1925 Merkel motorwheel for canoe, flyrod, anything in fishing tackle worth $35. Cheodone Dydowicz, The Island, Adams, Mass.

27,000 postmarks and metered mail, some entire envelopes, for 15,000 mixture foreign stamps. N. Smith, c/o S. Wacome, E. Chelmsford, Mass.

Single action Colts .45, single action .32 W. C. F. Want Colts or S. & W. H. Olmsted, 4200 Huntington Drive, Los Angeles, Cal.

Have clean good magazines and girls' books. Want roomy lady's desk. Mrs. V. Gebhardi, 533 E. 85th St., New York City.

Mandolin, bicycle parts, Hohner tremolo harmonica, C-12 tube, watch. Want radio parts. Henry Zonderwyk, 2818 Ormes St., Phila., Pa.

Will exchange cornet and case for shotgun, or pair new ice Club skates for .22 rifle. Theo. Barker, 3723 Gough St., Baltimore, Md.

Have .22 revolver, magazines, used stamps. Want Mutual or United coupons. What have you? Chas. Kady, 371 Henry St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Savage automatic, .20 double, 12 single, .44 six-gun, violin, outline knowledge. What have you? John Shed, Quinton, Okla.

Have tools, stamps, coins, guitar, uke. Want baseballs, .38 Colts, binoculars, shotgun, .25 automatic rifle. Floyd McClellan, 2820 Octavia, San Francisco, Cal.

Have auto smokers set, new. What have you? Warren Boggs, 316 E. Union St., Liberty, Ind.

Old Colts cap and ball revolver, rifles, swords, Belgian antique shotgun. Want modern guns. E. Shirkey, 297 W. Water St., Harrisonburg, Va.

Will trade pair of greyhound pups for Russian female. What have you? Geo. McCoy, Grinnell, Iowa.

Have 500 blank name cards. Want .22 double action revolvers. James Butterworth, Box 273, Highland Park, Ill.

Magazines. Want reproducer for Edison diamond disc phonograph, radio parts. John R. Sain, R. I., Post, Texas.

Have pair fencing swords, Remington .22 rifle single shot. Want .32 or .38 automatic. Donald Crathers, 13 Sydenham St., Kingston, Ont., Canada.

2 "C" Junior Kodak, case, tripod and extra lens. Want .35 Remington, portable typewriter. A. Welton, Tawatinaw, Alta., Canada.

Have books, guns, flashlights, traps, fishing tackle, etc. What have you? H. Jacobs, Jefferson, Ohio.

Have bridle, spurs, quirt, cartridge belt, pistol, rifle holsters. Want tap and die set or mechanic's tools. Walter Hagen, 711 Derby St., Green Bay, Wisc.

Have Iver-Johnson .22 revolver, Gov't alcohol compass, 4x5 plate camera, carrying case. Want U. S. coins. Floyd Fuller, Grey Eagle, Minn.

Have 10-watt transmitter and receiver, best of new parts clarinet and soprano saxophone. Want baritone saxophone. Otto Fisk, Rossie, Iowa.

Have 8-foot skis, skates, books, flashlights, baseball shoes. Want trumpet, sax, radio. Kin Baker, 1205 Steuben St., Utica, N. Y.

Have riding breeches, books. Want books by Seltzer, Gregory and Ogden. Must be A-1 condition. C. Bennett, Scott and Centre Sts., Madisonville, Ky.

I would like to correspond with people living on ranches or anyone. Alyce Starrett, 1129 Vyse Ave., New York City.

2-year-old English setter, bird dog. Want .45 Colts, 12-ga. Winchester pump. Edgar Richardson, Henniker, N. H.

Kodak, picture 3¼x4¼, story books, new; pair new shoe skates, 8's. Want automatic .22 or .32. C. Warner, 127 Chestnut St., Cambridge, Mass.

For trade: 500 Indian arrow heads. What have you? Owen C. Williams, Randolph, Wisc.

Want Colt's automatic, tenor-banjo. Have Remington revolver, coins, radio parts, pistol, telegraph instrument books, mandolin. Louis Clasen, 537 E. 88th St., N. Y. C.

Boxing gloves, wrestling course, opera glasses, .32 calibre rifle, 100 books. What have you? C. McEvoy, 386 3rd St., Albany, N. Y.

Have Oliver typewriter, Kodak, electric table lamp. Want radio, old coins and other articles of value. William Roemir, Brokaw, Wisc.

Have 3-tube radio, 6 tubes 201A, Crosley Musicone, Spaulding basketball. Want saxophone, or? R. E. Bridges, Commiskey, Ind.

Have A-1 Rockford framing miter vise, saw, with frame clamp. What have you? Geo. Blackford, 514 N. Adams St., Carroll, Iowa.

Triplex auto knitting machine with instructions. Want radio or parts. B. McFall, 3325 West 34th Ave., Denver, Colo.

Have 48-lesson course for "C" melody sax, also course for violin. Want typewriter. Earl Moffatt, Limerick, New York.

Violin, hunting knife, riding bridle, casting rod, .22 revolver, punching bag. Want bow and metal-tipped arrows. Henry Dufel, Sawyer, Wisc.

Wanted old violin. Have Baker 10-ga. double hammer, .22 repeater Remington with silencer, coins. Chas. Krummel, Donnellson, Ill.

Want .32-.20 or .38 Colts. Have Oliver typewriter, riding boots, size 8, velour hat. Jack Anderson, Jr., Meadville, Nebr.

Want bicycle. Have magazines, banjo-uke, tenor-banjo, postal clerk practice case, old coins. D. Kane, 78 Kermit Rd., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want .44 S. & W. special. Mechanism must be A-1. Have shotguns. A. R. Welker, 406 N. Harvey Ave., Oak Park, Ill.

Trade Ford motor or violin in No. 1 condition. Want radio or radio parts. M. Weaver, Route 3, Logansport, Ind.

Encyclopedia, ice skates, flashlight, punching bag, magazines, books, stamp collection, traps. Want radio. Kenneth Snyder, 602 E. 4th Street, McCook, Nebr.

Have boxing gloves, watch, football, ice skates, tubes, shoe skates, banjo-uke. Want tenor-banjo. J. Robinson, 4102 16th Street, Jackson Heights, N. Y.

Have magazines, novels. Want .32 or .38 calibre revolver or pistol. James Woxland, Peterson, Minn.

Books, new automobile spotlight, piano rolls. What have you? Joseph McCable, 444 Washington St., Newark, N. J.

Have magazines, shotgun, 12-ga., pair ice skates. Want fancy riding bridle, martingale, ukulele. What have you? M. Scott, Bedford, Ind.

Oxo gas-heating stove will trade for 12, 16, or 20-ga. shotgun, repeater preferred. H. Dean, New Albin, Ia.

Have .22 Winchester repeater 1890 model, casting rod and good reel. Want motor, violin, radio. A. Dunahue, Kenton, Ohio.

Six fine trained and untrained hounds, all extra well bred. Want shotguns, radios, typewriters, binoculars, female coon, auto knitter. D. C. Welty, Shreve, Ohio.

Rubberized raincoat, new. Want riding bridle, blanket and lariat. Must be A-1. D. Watson, 1304 Sixth Ave., Great Fall, Mont.

Have guitar with case and instruction book. Want tenor-banjo or other musical instruments. Leonard Carmack, Box 261, Mercersburg, Pa.

Have Edison phonograph, game chickens, bird dogs, bull terrier, auto knitter. Want motorcycle, firearms, talking parrots. Hugh Simpson, Dawson, Ala.

Want typewriter. Have 1/3-H.P. A.-C. motor. Also new bolt cutters, size 1 inch. Ray Brown, 71 West Colorado St., Pasadena, Calif.

Will trade stamps for stamps. What have you? S. Trunkat, 1418 Claim St., N. S., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Have loss condensers, Varis coupler, reostats, standard sockets, tubes, tent, basketball. Want earphones, blow torch. S. Pellow, 15 Hope Ave., Worcester, Mass.

Exchange correspondence with anyone 16 to 21 years old. Nina Chaney, 610 O St., Bedford, Ind.

Have two saxophones, violin and other valuable instruments. Want value trombone, clarinet. Ben Daves, Box 34, Deming, N. Mex.

Have 3-tube radio, phonograph. Want shotguns, rifles, revolvers. Edwin A. Stivers, Ansonia, Conn.

Want .38 calibre Colt's six-gun. What do you want? D. Berry, 1855 68th Ave., Oakland, Calif.

Want English coach male pup. Will trade pups. Would take German coach. L. Phillips, Box 44, Edison, Nebr.

Want radio courses, literature on radio, diagram of five, Watt transmitter, correspondence with amateur stations. Ralph Michand, 130 Katahdin Ave., Millinocket, Maine.

Trade valuable formula, ingredients inexpensive, obtainable anywhere, rheumatism, stiff swollen joints, pleurisy. Directions. For what? A. Lowry, Molalla, Ore., Box 42.

Have good 12-ga. double barrel shotgun. Want good .22 long rifle or special repeater. Wm. Meyer, Rugby, N. Dak.

Have A-1 .32 Colt's automatic. Want .25-.20 or .32-.20 rifle. Must be good condition. J. Dickens, Reggs Route, Talequah, Okla.

Want to exchange correspondence with young people. Western and Southwestern states, especially southern Mo. S. Kaufman, 888 Stimson Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Trade good 2½ h. p. gas engine for A-1 cap and ball revolver, pistol or radio set. Orin Hutchinson, Thayer, Mo.

Have magazines. Want books or what have you? A. Cotterman, R. No. 3, Somerset, Ohio.

Have Arthur Muray and Farmer Burns courses, silver-plated bugle. Want tenor-banjo or uke. H. Bookman, R. F. D. No. 8, South Richmond, Va.

Height-growing course with apparatus, mandolin, stamp collection with album. Want banjo-uke, tenor-banjo. Leslie Bell, Eagle Hill, Alberta, Canada.

Have violin like new. Want Colt six-gun or automatic pistol. Loral Platt, 3112 N. 21st St., St. Louis, Mo.

Have magazines and other books. Want camera, victrola records. Mrs. B. U. Fanning, R. 3, Golden City, Mo.

Want pair flintlock or percussion pistols, long-barreled Colt, S. & W. revolver. What do you want? C. Gibbs, R. No. 1, Peoria, Ill.

125 four V light bulbs, straight base, second hand. Want radio parts, old coins, or any good offer. Howard Skelton, Williamstown, Pa.

Wanted .30-.30 Winchester carbine, Colt's .44 or .45, typewriter, chaps, binoculars. Have printing presses, .32 revolver, guitar. Vernon Anderson, Conrad, Mont.

Old Herbalist secrets or printed matter, cards, envelopes, letterheads for binoculars, guns or what? R. Braden, Hotel Hyatt, Cartersville, Ga.

For every U. S. ½ cent piece I will give 100 different foreign stamps or 50 different precancels. W. Newcity, Morrisville, Vt.

Have skunk dog, airedale-bluetic cross, 3 years old, female. Want radio, binocular, pump gun. Henry Schlung, Specht's Ferry, Iowa.

Want U. S. Springfield .30, model 1903, and Colt's Army automatic .45, model 1911. E. Alexander, 233 So. Maple Street, Marysville, Ohio.

Will correspond with anyone in the United States. Lucille Castleman, Box 263, Crossville, Tenn.

Harley Davidson motorcycle A-1 condition, saddle-bags or both front and rear fenders. C. Ferguson, Box 205, Freewater, Ore.

Will exchange 20 h. p. 4-cylinder motor for anything of equal value. Will Bradford, Eaton Rapids, Mich., R. D. No. 8.

Hand crocheted articles, one lunch cloth 54 inches with 12-inch lace. Want canaries, parakeets, lovebirds. Rose Gardner, Hay, Wash.

Have Professor Beery's horse-training course. Want other courses, or what? Chas. Moore, South Bunn St., Bloomington, Ill.

Have shotgun, Earl Leiderman course, boxing gloves, rabbits. Want .25 or .32 automatics, tent, pup. Ira Hill, 17 South Eighth St., Wilmington, N. C.

Patents U. S., and Canadian rights on fine household device. What have you? Edw. Merritt, 307 Harve St., E. Boston, Mass.

.22 single rifle and fishing tackle. Want phones, books and offers. R. Haner, 30 No. Beacon St., Allston, Mass.

Violin and case, set Stevenson's books, Everybody's Legal Admirer, ignition coil, new type 19-9 radio tubes. Willie Rud, Northwood, N. Dak.

Want Ultradyne set, good working condition. Have Remington .22, model 6, quite new, radio parts, magazines. John Hardy, Jr., Cathay, N. Dak.

A-1 .22 pistol, U. S. Eng. watch model compass. Want cowboy boots. Lee Hout, 2300 Raleigh St., Denver, Colo.

Wanted: free-lance art work to do, pantograph, Spanish books, anything concerning Canadian Mounted, foreign legions, rangers, rurales. Moran, 301 Shawmut Ave., Boston, Mass.

Stamps, postcard views, hundreds of books, all descriptions, army bugle. Want books on history. Clarence Griffin, Spindale, N. C.

Indian motorcycle, Harley-Davidson with sidecar, Ambassador radio, typewriter, .32 revolver, watch. What have you? Walter Seroka, 170 West St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have Liederman course, .22 Marlin, boxing gloves, fishing tackle, books. Want Savage, .300 or .250-300 takedown. Malcolm Walker, Box 95, Cottage Grove, Ore.

Cowboy spurs, belts, cuffs, radio, books, magazines, banjo-uke, telephone, electrical fixtures. Want electric tattoo set, old weapons. J. Duncan, 3015 Dunham, Kansas City, Mo.

Coon horn, typewriter. Wanted Irish water spaniel, registered male, or Beagles registered. V. Randall, Atlantic, Iowa.

Wanted: Colt automatic, .38 Colt army special. Have Eastman developing tank, Stewart speedometer, binoculars, tool box. H. Schmidt, 223 East 4th St., Redwing, Minn.

Have 1,100 foot link chain (surveyors). What have you to offer? E. Beverly, R. F. D. 6, Ozark, Ala.

Want back number magazines, radio books. Send list to Ralph Wm. Michaud, 130 Katadhin Ave., Millinocket, Maine.

Greyhound pups for trade, Milo bar-bell outfit, 225 lb. Want Russian wolf hound, female registered. Geo. McCoy, Grinnell, Iowa.

Wanted: Old-time pistols and revolvers, Colt revolving rifle, Remington frontier cartridge revolver. Address, Box 250, Angelo Camp, Calif.

Have electric player piano, tattooing outfit, carnival games, radio set. Want firearms, radio. Albert Eyre, 722 N. 38th St., Philadelphia, Pa.

A-1 Stevens model 10 target pistol, Remington .22 calibre, autoloading rifle. Want good shotgun, or other firearms. E. Snyder, Sabetha, Kansas.

Have Liederman's muscle building and wrestling course, Guitar method, tattooing outfit, Milo bar-bells, Atwater Kent. Elmer Larsen, 10044 Avenue M, Chicago, Ill.

Have A-1 .38 special. Want .30-.30 Luger, or .45 Colt automatic. D. Hines, Dublack, Ky.

Have 40 acres clear land. Want car, diamond or town property. Repeating rifles for banjo, cameras. Higle, Box 341, New England, N. Dak.

Pair field glasses, guitar, books, Kentucky 44-inch barrel rifle. Want pistols or relics. Lester Wagner, 1117 South 3rd St., Ironton, Ohio.

Wanted: String instruments, guns, motors, radio, tools, Have shotgun, knitter, rifle, scales, bicycle, books. Francis Fort, Red Oak, Iowa.

Trade old stamp collection for three-tube radio or portable Corona typewriter. Joe Dawson, Cascade, Idaho.

Have guitar, .30-.06 rifle, .32 Mauser automatic pistol. Want single action Colt, .32-.20 preferred, or binoculars. Clifford Reede, Goldfield, Iowa.

Evenrude outboard motor in fine shape for .35 Remington automatic or what? Edward Hill, Chisholm, Minn, R. 1, Box 22.

Want police or wolfhound pup. What do you want? Leo Thilbault, 114 County, Fall River, Mass.

Want old postage stamps. What do you want in exchange? J. E. Miller, Box 371, Chatham, New York.

Wanted: Earle Liederman "The muscle builder course and exerciser." Have Western fiction. Gerard Poudrette, 69 Franklin St., Danielson, Conn.

Have Brunswick phonograph records, gold pieces, erector, Kodak, 1-tube Crosley radio, accordion, for other old coins. F. Barnwell, 4011A So. Grand Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Civil War sword, bayonet, confederate money, novelties. What have you? Bernard Witt, Jr., 1802 St. Joseph Ave., St. Joseph, Mo.

Have magic lantern film, baseball mitt, flashlight, books. Want 1-tube radio, guns, boxing gloves. Axel Koartumen, Box 151, Trout Creek, Mich.

Have Henning concert violin. Want .20 gauge pump in excellent condition. What have you? Norman Tremper, 914 State St., Utica, New York.

Want quilt pieces. Have magazines. Miss C. Abbott, Seneca, Kans.

Electrical course, several hundred magazines, and vending machines to exchange for printing press or novelties. J. C. Mears, 9 Crombie St., Burlington, Vt.

Trade 1-minute camera, typewriter. What have you? Bert Mays, Oklahoma City, Okla., No. 8, Box 187.

Have 75 magazines. Want ukulele, banjo-uke, camera or what have you? Russell French, Fairview Sanatorium, Normal, Ill.

Have electrical invention. Want automobile or something high valued. What have you? Fred Naef, Silver Lane, Conn.

.22 Stevens target pistol, 6-inch barrel. Want single barrel shotgun or anything useful. Al Raver, Edgemont, S. Dak.

Wanted job on ranch. Can milk ride, handle cattle, good all-around worker. Jerry Bean, 37 29th St., San Francisco, Calif.

Winchester repeating rifle .22, Remington single .22, movie film, 2 year sautomobile digest for? E. Cable Main St., West Manchester, Ohio.

One pair of new Winchester hockey skates. Would like .32 six-shooter. John Pinney, 6 High St., Oneonta, New York.

Want reflex radio. Have carburetor, .45 single action Colt, .32 single action Colt, mandolin. H. Olmsted, 4200 Huntington Drive, Los Angeles, Calif.

Trade 50 steel traps and pup tent for .38 or .45 double action six-gun with holster. M. McCauley, Hopkins, Minn, Box 752.

Have magazines and army bugle. Want rawhide riata or horsehair lariat. Calvin Crawford, Lisbon, Ark.

Have fielders glove, rod, reel, shotgun, ammunition belt, traps, magazines, books, cowboy hat. Want typewriter, boxing gloves, banjo-mandolin, camera. Ed. Calhoun, Anderson, Mo.

Have razors, Elgin watch, carpenters tools. Want .22 Winchester repeating rifle, tubular racing skates with shoes attached (9). Lewis Howard, Bussey, Iowa.

Have physical culture course, shotgun, camera. Want .22, .32, .45 automatic, .30 Luger, field-glasses, old coins. Charles Patrick, Gillette, Wyoming.

Have 50 packages, Supertone Herb tea, 20 doz. packages perfumed sachette powder, books. What offered? J. Settel, 24 Crosby Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have one-tube radio, single barrel shotgun, single shot .22 rifle. Want anything equal value. Joseph Downer, 301 Ann St., Newburgh, N. Y.

Have books, magazines, pair hockey skates, 2 sleds, stamps, etc. What have you? Robert Behrena, 2614 Hampshire Rd., Cleveland Heights, Ohio.

Wanted: Ancient .45 six-gun, old style, with holster. What do you want? Ray Mitchell, Michigan Ave., R. R. 1, Whittier, Calif.

Wanted: Snapshots of fires, wrecks, war scenes, back numbers National Geographic magazine, radio books, magazines. Ralph Michaud, 130 Katadhin Ave., Millinocket, Maine.

Have books, carbolite lamp, cyclemeter, bicycle tools and box, siren, reflector. What have you? Geo. Koechel, 1828 East 35th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

Remington .44, cap and ball revolver. Want .25-.20 rifle or revolver larger than .22 calibre. Vincent Kornowig, 261 Chapman St., New Britain, Conn.

Have hand-made horse-hair bridle, martingale and quirt, value $40. Want typewriter, radio, guns. L. Riggs, Gen. Del., Bristol, Va.

Have bicycle and Ford parts, golf clubs, gas iron, books, instruments, .38 H. & R. revolver, for anything. Raymond Moulton, Fonda, Iowa.

Wanted: greyhound pups. Have .32 automatic pistol, mounted cock pheasant, beagle dog 13-inch strain. Earl Hall, R. R. 3, Dayton, Ohio.

Trade real business, plans, musical instruments, mining stock, patent, other articles. What have you? A. Quenzer, 315 Barbey St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want .45 calibre S. & W. revolver. Have D. B. shotgun, Chinese musette, Crosley V complete, Hawaiian post-cards. J. Brooks, Fulton, Kentucky.

Have punching bag, .22 revolver, .22 Winchester repeater, Gillette razor, Clifford guitar, magazines. Want typewriter, .32 Colt, wrestling course. E. Bigler, Sabetha, Kans.

Wanted foreign or domestic stamps. Have novels. R. T. Hughes, Box 426, Brett, Ia.

Trade typewriter for Marbles game-getter. I. W. Randall, 155 West Main St., Rochester, N. Y.

Wanted job on ranch or farm. Can milk, ride, handle stock. Good all-around worker. Jerry Bean, 37 29th St., San Francisco, Calif.

Trade steel traps, bellows tree, den smoker, Swiss rifle, bugle, side wheeler. What have you? H. Conts, 322 N. 12th St., Clarinda, Ia.

Want A-1 Indian motorcycle. Have electric trains, transformer, radio, aerial, baseball out, books. A. Olson, 4460 Park Ave., New York, N. Y.

Four Pacent adapters for UV199 radio tubes, stamps, old geography 1823. Want postage stamps. Arthur Paltz, Jr., 1700 So. State St., Syracuse, N. Y.

Have Kodak camera, typewriter. Want motor, steam engine, small woodworking machinery. Henry Nelson, 1545 Madison St., Eau Claire, Wis.

Want samples of every magazine, county paper, or state bulletin published for magazine collection. L. Vollrath, West Union, S. C.

Trade one portfolio of the World War, foreign and U. S. stamps. What have you? S. Kavanaugh, 3015 Eldridge Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Have .22 single, 12-ga. single, artillery saddle. Trade for .32 Colt revolver or automatic. H. Merriwether, R. F. C., Milton, Fla.

1917 Colt .45, 2 shotguns, 2 watches. Want good firearms, Remington cap and ball revolver. Sam Rice, 11th St., Catlettsburg, Ky.

Have antique revolvers. Want .45 Colt automatic or other firearms. Make offer. H. Cavelin, 61 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass.

Have boxing gloves, revolver .38 calibre, old-time Western revolver, phonograph, Victor and Columbia records, books. Alex. Schultz, 248 South Ann St., Baltimore, Md.

Bicycle in good condition, to be exchanged for anything that is equal value. J. Nicholas, 1106 Union Ave., New York, N. Y.

Want to trade for 10-ga. double hammerless full-choke shotgun, Ithaca or Remington preferred. B. Yancey, Box 1152, Klamath Falls, Ore.

Have 224 rounds of metal patched cartridges for the calibre .30-.06 Springfield rifle. What have you? L. Heino, Box 783, Eveleth, Minn.

Want history of Long Island, N. Y. Have hand printing press, gun, tents and carpenters tools. Charles Abrams, 519 Powling Ave., Troy, N. Y.

Want B flat trumpet, shoe skates (10½). Have Stevens .22 repeater, boxing gloves, camera. Wm. Hartman, Box 161, West Upton, Mass.

Have case drafting tools, 2 triangles, French curve and arc. No books. What have you? Herbert Vernon, 205 Hamilton Ave., Paterson, N. J.

Have .41 calibre revolver, razors, 4 W.D.11 tubes. Want typewriter, duplicator, radio parts. Morris Epstein, 183 Harrison Ave., Brooklyn, New York.

Have cameras, photographic supplies and ice skates. Want duplicator, radio parts. What have you? Morris Rudy, 104 Harrison Ave., Brooklyn, New York.

Have second size Gearhart knitter, will trade for carpet loom, Western magazines. Mrs. A. Akerly, Morse, Ia.

Have books to trade for books. J. E. Hartwig, 7011 Bonsallo Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Have new Northwestern school taxidermy course. Want new double end punching bag. Breitbort physical culture course. Mitchell Kruszewski, Box 186, Dillonvale, Ohio.

Brandes table talker, almost new. Make offer. John Paakki, R. F. D. 104, Maynard, Mass.

Wanted spanish or Mexican newspapers for correspondence and picture, Eastern girl. V. Marquerite Darrell, Waubay, S. D.

Have muscular developing exercisers, not much used. Want Remington .22 rifle or Winchester. H. Mattson, 3221 Ridge St., Calumet, Mich.

Have A-1 German camera. Want .22 Winchester automatic, must be in good condition. F. Stafford, Harvey, No. Dak.

Have 12-ga. single barrel shotgun, automatic rejector, cap and ball revolver. Want revolver or automatic. Herbert Cochran, 701½ Elm St., Zanesville, Ohio.

Have books, magazines, musical instruments, correspondence courses. Want liberty headed 1913 nickels, art course, or Studebaker watch. J. Traynor, Baldwin Ave., Nicholasville, Ky.

Oliver typewriter perfect condition, fine violin and case. Want good guns or revolvers. A. Levriett, Box 3342, Sta. F., Jacksonville, Fla.

Post-card Mandolcete camera, .25 automatic, set boxing gloves. Want old coins, relics, old pistols. Lester Wagner, 1117 South 3rd St., Ironton, Ohio.

Portable victrola, tenor-banjo, charotola, baby calculation. Will exchange for anything different of equal value. M. Miller, R. 4, Abingdon, Va.

Wanted Remington typewriter, 16-ga. double-barreled Iver-Johnson shotgun. Have three-tube radio set. Jas. White, 1738 Quincy Ave., Scranton, Pa.

Colt acelylene gas plant new model 50 with 3-burner plate, two 32-volt motors. Want radio, white leghorn pullets. F. Hoag, R. 1, Vicksburg, Mich.

Have complete outfit and course in finger prints. Want radio, drawing outfit, typewriter. Francis J. Lichon, 1026 Perkins St., Saginaw, Mich.

Have new .380 Remington automatic, saxophone and snare drum. Want female police pup and radio. Neil Hughes, Ionia, Ia.

Wanted—Colt .380 automatic. Must be new or equivalent. Have many articles. H. Schmidt, 223 East 4th St., Red Wing, Minn.

Want United States postage stamps, old and new issues, and commemoratives. Have foreign stamps. Arnold Bauer, Wabasso, Minn.

Trade—Belgian double barrel 32 inch, .25 Colt, and Eastman kodak for police pup, 16-gauge Remington pump. C. Stafford, Harvey, North Dakota.

Want Ford generator, A-1 condition, and binoculars. Have Studebaker generator and starter. Franklin Smith, R. D. No. 4, Eldred, Pa.

Different kinds of curios, books, magazines. Want Indian relics. Lester Wilson, Route 4, Plano, Texas.

Want good saxophone and typewriter. Have parts for Fords, 2-tube radio set. Ruggles Apthorpe, 1079 Newton Ave., Lawrence Park, Erie, Pennsylvania.

Want Breitbart or Liederman course, .22 revolver. Have .22 rifle, ice skates, flashlight, collection of local flowers, field-glasses. J. Sawyer, 210 South 3rd St., Livingston, Mont.

Want back numbers National Geographical Magazine, photos or snapshots of great fires, disasters, wrecks, tornadoes, floods, noted people. Ralph Michaud, 130 Katadhin Ave., Millinocket, Maine.

3-year-old American brown Spaniel, well trained. Want guns. What have you? Fred Stevenson, Onawa, Ia.

Would like to correspond with any boy or girl in Arizona or New Mexico. Bruce Willis, Box 402, Vacaville, Calif.

Have new metal toys, one violin, printing presses, stamps, foot power press, automatic. E. Smith, Box 97, Paxinor, Pa.

Have guns, knives, swords, holsters, shells and U. S. Army goods to trade. Herbert Cochran, 701½ Elm St., Zanesville, Ohio.

Have A-1 12-ga. single, 20-ga. double, .32 automatics. Want cur or hound silent trailer. Must have trial. C. Hahn, Box 457, Umatilla, Fla.

Magazines, books, A-1 condition by all authors. A-1 genuine Hawaiian uke for trumpet, model cornet. L. Walker, W. Yeasting St., Gibsonburg, Ohio.

Ice skates, size 9, guitar. Want fieldglasses. What have you? C. Weber, 3114 E. 98th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

Small block and tackle, pruning shears, old Washburn guitar, piano music. Want printing outfit. F. Miller, 909 So. Joliet St., Joliet, Ill.

Uke and case, .50-.20 rifle, rings, cigarette cases, oil heater, magazines, water circulator, dog. Want overhead values. Edw. Johnson, Box 129, Wilson, N. Y.

Have auto knitting machine, bugle, guns, graphophones, violin, books. Want tools, watches. What have you? F. Heater, Burnsville, W. Va.

Magazines all kinds, two cell focus light. Want .22 rifle or revolver. Raymond Graham, R. D. No. 2, East Gloversville, N. Y.

Wanted Indian relics from Oregon, Arizona, Maine, Texas, Nevada, Mass. Have books, curios, watches. Lester Wilson, Route 4, Plano, Texas.

New special Springfield 1903. Watson No. 5 front globe, Lyman No. 48 rear, Sporter Stock. Want shotgun. Frank Brown, Faxon, Okla.

Iver Johnson single shotgun, top, typewriter, safeguard check writer, books, roll film camera. Want lots. Harry Johnson, Franklin Ave., Berlin, N. J.

Have bamboo rod, eclipse reel, Remington repeater. What have you? Robert Peterson, 154 East Valley Road, Montecito, Santa Barbara, Calif.

Have ukulele with Ferry automatic noteless player, selections music, complete candy makers course. Want practical course. John Segee, East Barrington, N. Y.

Magazines, books, shoe skates, swimming suit, etc. to trade. What have you to offer? Wayne Howell, Kimmswick, Mo.

Want printing press, swords, pistols, anything antique. Have complete tattoo outfit, tattoo remover, taxidermy course. Edward Linna, 199 Lobin St., Negaunee, Mich.

Want old U. S. coins, provisional and Confederate state stamps. What do you want? C. Grandwise, Box 136, Crabtree, Pa.

Have a Confederate ten-dollar bill. What have you to trade? Cliggie Nelson, Box 53, Holliday, Kansas.

Have Ford motor parts, .32 revolver, .38 Colt's, Winchester repeater, double shotgun. What have you? Barney Stellmach, R. No. 2, Foreston, Minn.

Have stamps, practically every country. Want portable typewriter or good camera. Calvin Bard, N. S. Naval Training Station, Gyro School, San Diego, Calif.

For trade Indian relics, house and lot in Keifer, Okla. What have you? Frank Jones, Smithfield, Ill.

Campstove, .22 target pistol, Airedale pups. Want L. C. Smith shotgun, binoculars. E. Hull, Indian Springs, Ind.

Would like to exchange magazines or trade for telescope, fieldglass, printing press, .22 revolver. Julius Collins, Crum, W. Va.

Wanted chaps, boots, cartridge belt, holster. Have radio, books, glasses, typewriter. C. Farnsworth, R. 4, Johnson City, Tenn.

Have A-1 course, National Salesman Training. Want Remington double, Marlin pump and fishing tackle. O. Graves, 408 East Maple St., Hoopeston, Ill.

Have cowboy outfit. What have you? John Blair, 1105 N. Horsman St., Rockford, Ill.

Have books. Want magazines. James Loomis, Granville, N. Y.

Wanted old coon hound to train pup with. What have you and what do you want? Fred Gibbs, Princeton, Ill.

Black and brown coat, black crepe dress, watch, bracelets, zither harp. Equal value in trade. Mrs. J. Smith, Rutland, Ohio.

Edison complete dictaphone, A-1 condition. Anything worth while. R. Staub, c/o Watson, 523 W. 135th St., N. Y. C.

Guns, watches, tools, hardware, books. Thoroughbred dogs, geese, ducks, poultry birds, stamps. J. Dalton, Wellsville, Ohio.

Want course locomotive firing, radio, uke. Have books, business law, shorthand, show card writing. Roy Risberg, 1010 County Building, Chicago, Ill.

Blow accordion, picture machine, watch, bicycle, motor, long pant suit, 16-year size. What have you? Charlie Scott, Burthington Ave., Worthington, Minn.

Latest model Gearhart knitting machine, for good saddle, phonograph, hens. J. Boyd, Laiban, N. Mex.

Shotgun, books, fountain pen, stamps, other articles. Want Indian relics of all kinds. H. Matthew 520½ Lake St., Elmira, N. Y.

Have game heads fresh mounted, eagles, hawks, owls. What have you? W. Rand, 715 7th St., Brandon, Manitoba, Can.

Slightly used motorcycle parts, course carpentering building. Want tools, guns, bulldog pup, books, courses electrical and mechanical. C. Harris, Hamein, Texas.

WANTED—INFORMATION

Are you looking for anyone who has been missing for a long time? If so, write down, either typed or hand-printed, all particulars and we will publish your notice in ACE-HIGH. *Notices may be listed anonymously if you so desire. Before taking action concerning any answers received, be sure to lay the matter before us. We assume no responsibility for this department. Do not send any money to strangers. Notify us at once when you have found your man.*

BALLARD, FOREST GLEN—Age 25 years, nearly 6 feet tall, with light brown hair, hazel eyes. Was in Seattle, Wash., when last heard of. His cousins, M. L. P. and M. A. P., would like to hear from him or from anyone having information concerning him. M. L. and M. A. P., Lake Crystal, Minn., R. No. 3.

STALVEY, WILLIAM M.—Last heard from in Detroit, Mich., June, 1925. He is 22 years old, 5 feet 6 inches tall, weighs about 130 pounds. Has dark brown eyes, black hair, light complexion. Anyone knowing his present whereabouts is asked to notify his brother. M. F. Stalvey, 1714 Whiteside St., Chattanooga, Tenn.

CAMPBELL, AUSTIN—Has blue eyes and light hair, is 12 yrs. old. Last heard of in Boise, Idaho. His sister is anxious to hear from him. Mrs. Veda Berry, Route No. 1, Box 89, Idaho Falls, Idaho.

CARR, N. H. E.—Lived in Spokane, Wash. Worked for the Ford Company as salesman, selling Ford parts. Last seen 2 years ago when he called on us at the Home Apartments, Eugene, Oregon. Would like to locate him as have important news for him. Munnie.

CAUDELL, W. E.—Has not been heard from since he stepped out of the house. I know of no reason for his going away from home. Information appreciated. Lee Caudell, 838 S. Main St., Hazard, Ky.

CHANDLER, FRANK CHARLES—Age at present 32 years next Sept. Was large for age. Has been missing since Aug. 28, 1909. Left home in night, taking dog and bicycle. He and neighbor lad left together. Neighbor lad came home year later, not claiming to know of Chandler's whereabouts. Would now probably be about 5 feet 11 inches tall. Has dark, straight hair and grey-blue eyes. Palm of left hand badly scarred by explosion of rifle bullet. Mother is still living and separated from his father. Family all living. Anyone who knows or has known of his whereabouts, please write to his sister, Mrs. Hazel West, P. O. Box 1900, or 201 E. Allegheny Ave., Emporium, Pa.

CHRISTENSEN, WALTER—Last seen in Seattle, about six years ago. He is 6 feet tall. Howard Christensen, 1917 Lombard, Everett, Wash.

DANIELS, CONLEY or CONN—Left home Jan. 27, 1925, went to Norfolk, Va., and from there to some place in Florida for the winter. Last heard from in Atlanta, Ga., July 22 the same year. He is about 48 years of age, bald-headed, weighs 150 to 155 pounds, and is 6 feet tall. Has a long-shaped head and brown eyes, slight dimple in chin. When he left home he wore black plush hat, blue-serge suit, dark grey overcoat with belt. Condition of his wife is serious owing to his absence. I am very anxious to hear from him. Hubert S. Laws, R. 1, Cedar Grove, Mo.

DUNCAN, WILLIAM—About 36 years old, 5 feet 8 inches tall, dark hair and gray eyes. He once served in the rangers. I have news for him in regard to property in Webb County, Texas. Please write information of his whereabouts to R. W. Linton, General Delivery, Sweetwater, Texas.

DEVEREAUX, WILLIAM—Last heard from during the late war at Camp Lewis, Tacoma, Wash., with first U. S. Infantry, Co. D. Before that was with same outfit at Schoffield Barracks, Haw Knob, Tenn., for about five years. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated by his old pal, James E. Bache, 120 Linden St., Syracuse, N. Y.

ELVIN, ALFRED—Please write to me at the same old address. Mother is poorly. Elizabeth has been an invalid for eight years. Effie.

ENRIQUEZ, JOE—Last heard of in Texas working on ranch. Would like to get in touch with him as I have very important and interesting news. Age 26, weight 154, height 5 feet 9 inches, dark hair. "Farmer of Mexico." Address A. W. L., Box 42, Molalla, Ore.

F. L. G.—Please write. Everything is all right. Ann.

GOODMAN, MARY or ALICE—My two half-sisters left home when I was a baby about one year of age. When their father was killed Mother remarried, and there were five of us. Her name by the second marriage was Compton. Mother died in 1904, at Thacker, W. Va. I have been told my older sister Mary was married and that my younger sister Alice was with a show, and I think she married an actor, whose name I do not know. Out mother's maiden name was Sanders. Any information will be most gratefully received by Mrs. Herbert Damron, 223 W. 6th St., Perrysburg, Ohio.

GWINN, GEORGE HENRY—Left Ipswich, Mass., in April, 1916. Last heard from in British Royal Navy, from which he was discharged invalided in 1918. Has not been heard from since. Was 5 ft. 7 in., slim-built, had brown hair, blue eyes, and was about 33 years of age. Any information given will be very gratefully received by his mother. Mrs. Jennie Gwinn, 105 High St., Ispwich, Mass.

HIGGS, SOLOMON C.—He was born and raised at Cotton, Ark. Left home in 1918 and was last heard of in Kansas City, Mo. Anyone knowing his whereabouts, please communicate with Howard Toga Wood, Box 96, Center, Okla.

HOGAN, WILLIAM, JAMES, EDWARD, or NELLIE MURRAY—Thurles Co., Tipperary, Ireland, was their birthplace, which they left 55 years ago. Went to Brooklyn, N. Y. Edward had one daughter and one son named Julad Edward. Nellie Murray left a blind daughter in institution in Dublin, Ireland. Perhaps some of the above people's children are living, even if the mentioned are dead. Margaret Hogan, Johns St., Nenagh Co., Tipperary, Ireland.

KESSLER, JOHN C.—About 27 years of age, 6 feet tall, 180 lbs. in weight, light-complexioned. Freshman, O. S. U., class 1923. Formerly lived near Greenville, Ohio. Last heard from in Milwaukee, Wisc., 1921. Your old college chum, "Ed" from northern Ohio, would appreciate a letter. Address care Coleman Bros. Lumber Co., Lower Lake, Lake County, Calif.

JIM—Why don't you write to O? She is worrying about you, and has not returned to—nor is she going. Would go to you if she knew where you were. The boy calls you. Victor M. R., Box 523, Orlando, Florida.

KEMP, LENAR—Haven't seen her since I was very small. She and my brother John were taken by Uncle John Duper after death of our parents, Oscar and Fannie Kemp. Any information will be gladly received by William A. Kemp, Clinton, Okla.

MACK, CARRIE or BIRDIE—Please write your mother, Mrs. Kate Mack, care Denver Farm, Henderson, Colo. Your brother Jimmie is dead and your mother is in county institution, grieving her heart away with longing to hear from her children. Mrs. K. L. Farr.

MORGAN, JULIA COUGHLAN—Husband's name is Cornelius Morgan. She was born in City of Cork, Ireland, and left there about 40 years ago. Husband was foreman at Chelmford foundry, Boston, about that time. Last heard from through brother in Cork. Gave her address at that time as India Rubber Factory, Boston, S. W., Mass. I wrote that address but received no reply. Any information regarding this family will be greatly appreciated. Timothy Coughlan, opposite Barracks Cahir, County Tipperary, Ireland.

WENGER, GUS—Age 27 years, blue eyes. Last heard of in San Diego, Calif. Was in the navy for some time. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please send his address to Marguerite S. Schonenberger, Wisdom, Mont.

AROUND THE STOVE

COME AGAIN, SHIPMATE!

Readers' Pub. Corp.,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Editor and Readers of "Ace-High":

Will you allow an old sea-dog (or should I say a young one, as I am only 35 years) around the stove? First I want to congratulate the Editor and contributors of "Ace-High" for putting (what I imagine) the spirit of the West in a seaman.

It is a far cry from the ocean to the ranch, but believe me I keep my weather eye peeled for "Ace-High," and enjoy everyone of their yarns.

I am a licensed marine engineer, but have quit going to sea lately to ring in on this Florida boom, so am able to heave to in my berth with "Ace-High" as soon as it lands on the newsstand.

I second the motion of Miss Sadie M. Carroll about starting a club of "Ace-High" readers, but why not also make it a correspondence club, as I for one would like to hear from the other readers, especially the ladies.

Well, I guess I had better ring off and drop anchor for this time.

Yours sincerely,
P. O. Box 38, Pompano, Fla. *C. C. LOWE.*

"ONCE A READER, ALWAYS A READER"

"Ace-High Magazine,"
799 Broadway,
New York City.

Gentlemen:

I am a constant reader of "Ace-High," and I don't believe there is any other magazine that can even rival your Western stories. If a man once buys an "Ace-High," he is sure to buy the next number also. In your February first issue, "The Killer of Outlaw Peak" was sure to hog-tie its reader for the following issue.

Hoping to read some more like "The Killer," I remain,

Princeton, Ill. FRED M. GEBBS.

PECOS PETERS AND CROSS-EYED READERS

Dear Sir:

I find after many readings of your "Ace-High" that some of our English magazines would have to go a long way to beat it. Your magazine was first in my hands in the late part of last year; since then I have been a regular reader, although I have read most of C. E. Mulford's books. I have been wondering if it would be possible to make some of your stories in book form, for instance one hundred stories to a book and published four or three times a year. Perhaps more, perhaps less. Over here we pay 3½ pence and 3 pence for your magazine, but when I came to read Pecos Peters, "Cross-Eyed Gun Gent," and etc., well, I reckon anybody would be cross-eyed not to buy it.

So I am wishing your magazine and writers every success, which I am sure they duly deserve. I remain,

H. P. WAINWRIGHT.

65 Thackeray Ave., Tottenham, P. 17, London, Eng.

LESS FAIR SEX INTEREST!

Harold Hersey, Editor,
"Ace-High Magazine."

Dear Sir:

I have noted, with pleasure, that you are gradually herding the Western stories which carry the love and the girl element, into "Ranch Romances." That is as it should be—now all readers may know what to expect —"Ranch Romances" for Western fiction tinged with the love theme for the general reader; "Ace-High" for the real Western he-man stuff that is so difficult to come by, but so wholesome and greeted with joy by all male readers everywhere.

The reader is assured when he buys "Ace-High" that the movement and action of the story is not impeded by the fair sex cluttering up the landscape.

The "Ace-High" type of magazine has been long overdue and it fills a real void in the fiction magazine field.

Sincerely yours,

T. O. CONNOR.

7058 Eggleston Ave., Chicago, Ill.

WELL BALANCED ALL AROUND

"Ace-High Magazine,"
799 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Just a few words to compliment you on your fine magazine. I will take pleasure in saying that your magazine "Ace-High" contains enough reading matter of different stories to satisfy the average young American "magazine worm." Ray Nafziger supplies us with the average amount of wit, while J. E. Leithead and others sure put the ice water in our blood veins when it comes to action and gun-play. "Ace-High" is well balanced all around.

Again wishing the editors and readers of "Ace-High" prosperity, I remain,

Yours very truly,

HERBERT S. LEE.

R. F. D. 2, Stanley, Wis.

AS THEY HAPPEN

Dear Sir:

I dropped in a newsstand here and saw your magazine and thought I would give it a try. It sure contains real he-man stories true to life. I have been in lumbercamps out West in the Dakotas, in the sticks of Missouri and boom towns, and even found time to attend college, and things happen about the same as you describe them. Hats off, fellows, to "Ace-High!"

Sincerely,

GEORGE SANBORN.

Chappell, Neb.

A DOUBLE KICK

"Ace-High Magazine,"
799 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen: I get a double kick out of my 20c. each issue of "Ace-High." The stories are so good that I seldom stop reading until the last one is finished. Then I read the ads and answer those that are interesting to me, both in the Bargain Counter and other advertisements.

I want to thank those who answered my ad and who received no reply, and say to them that they try again and we may swap the next time, but one can not exchange with a hundred when you have but the one article.

Thanking you for the insertion of my Bargain Counter notice, I am,

Very respectfully,

WILLIAM F. O'BRIEN.

Box 273, Pierceton, Ind.

BETTER THAN SHOW OR RADIO

Dear Editor:

I have been a reader of the best magazine on earth for two years. Reading "Ace-High" is better than going to a show or listening on the radio. Have made several trades from the Country Store department. The name of the best all-around magazine is "Ace-High." So come on with a few more of "Pinkey Jenkins" stories and stories like "The Killer of Outlaw Peak." In fact, all of the stories can't be beat. Can't hardly wait for next issue.

Yours truly,

H. E. COUTS.

322 N. 12th St., Clarinda, Iowa.

TO THE VERY LAST AD

Dear Sirs:

Your "Ace-High Magazine" is a "Wow." No kiddin', it takes the cake. The best Western stories I ever read, and I don't mean perhaps.

Every story in every issue is a knockout. When I start reading I don't lay down the magazine until I finish the last ad on the back page.

Yours till the cows come home,

MACKLIN S. CHERNOFF.

2634 W. Iowa St., Chicago, Ill.

A RESOLUTION AND A HOPE

Editor, "Ace-High Magazine."

Dear Sir: I have not been a steady reader of your magazine, but I have resolved I will be from now on.

I stopped in at a newsstand a few evenings ago and your front cover of the first February number caught my eye. You sure publish some fine, interesting stories. There is only one thing I do not like in any magazine, and that is serials. I never read them.

You have a reader's coupon for the readers to send in their choice of the stories, also the ones they do not like. But here's my answer: For this issue the stories all are fine, cannot be beat. Count on me for a steady reader of "Ace-High." Like Charles "Curly" Fufwider says, I hope the "Ace-High" goes higher.

Very truly yours,

L. B. JOHNSON.

R. D. 8, Washington, Penn.

SPEAKS A WORD FOR ACE-HIGH'S "LITTLE BROTHER"

"Ace-High Magazine."

Dear Editor: Here's hopin' I'm not hornin' in, but would like to have my pow-wow along with the rest of the other hombres.

My sis and I read every issue of "Ace-High," "Ranch Romances" and "Cowboy Stories."

My favorite stories are those with good gunfights in them. So when I get the next "Cowboy Stories" mag I hope to find a good gunfight yarn.

Please keep up the good work and "the little brother" of "Ace-High" will be a big success. I will recommend this magazine to all lovers of Western stories.

Yours truly,

WALLACE CULVER.

1427 Washington Blvd., Detroit, Mich.

COMMENTS FROM DON S.

Querido amigo:

Glad to see Paul L. Anderson and his leather-pusher Jimmy Connell in a recent issue. Is J. Edward Leithead a Lone Star Stater or does he hail from Oklahoma?

Wonder if enough readers are interested in the Argentine Republic to make a Guacho serial worth while. Wish we could hear from some of the "Ace-High" readers on this score. The West first every time, but!

Judging by the mail and gossip Around the Stove this month the Britons are elated with "A.-H." Just for curiosity I for one hombre wonder into what out-of-the way places in the world "Ace-High" reaches. I bet it drifts to Central and South America and even as distant as the Transvaal, South Africa.

The Bostonians were well represented in current

Country Store, and the Bay State showed up fine. Lifelong friendships are every day being cemented through the medium of that old trade mart.

I'm nearly out of breath, pardner. Please publish ud when convenient and oblige yours gratefully,

Su seguro servidor,

Boston, Mass. *DON S.*

"UNRAVELS ALL THE BONDS—"

The Editor, "Ace-High Magazine,"
New York City.

Dear Sir: As you may know—ahem, at least by hearsay—there is a certain game of cards that has enjoyed a fair degree of popularity for several years, and in which a "royal flush" is the highest winning hand. Incidentally, this must be "Ace-High."

After reading your magazine for the first time, I thought its title a royal one. Subsequent issues have confirmed me in the opinion that "Ace-High" is superior to any four of the average kind of magazines read for recreation.

For mental relaxation after a hard day, for bright imagery to banish clouds of worry, for a publication that is always joyous in tone, "Ace-High," to my mind, stands supreme. To paraphrase Shelley, it unravels all the bonds that bind the hidden soul of good humor.

With gratitude to you and to the writers of your magazine for many a pleasant hour, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Troy, N. Y. *VINCENT MOUNTAIN.*

A FRIEND FROM VIRGINIA

Readers' Publishing Corp.,
799 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen: I like your "Ace-High Magazine" fine. I eagerly look forward to the 3rd and 18th of each month, when they go on sale here in our town at the newsstand, and I can get the new issues.

It's O. K. from cover to cover, but I am wild about the exploits of Hooker Bros. of Canyon Lobo as well as the rest, and "The Country Store" is very, very interesting. With best wishes,

Very sincerely,

E. E. SHIRKEY.

Harrisonburg, Va.

CONSIDERS "ACE-HIGH" AN INSTITUTION

Editor, "Ace-High."

Dear Sir: Will you accept my thanks for many wonderful hours passed through the medium of "Ace-High"? You cannot get enough editions per month to suit me. Why don't you start an "Ace-High" club? Count on me as a charter member if you do. Your magazine is now an American institution, in my estimation. Best luck.

Sincerely yours,

FRANK H. SEATON.

186 Tenth St., Buffalo, N. Y.

A FEW NOTES ON BALDY SOURS

Harold Hersey,
Editor, "Ace-High Magazine," N. Y. City.

Dear Mr. Hersey: Your letter of December 17th received. I shall certainly try and keep you supplied with Baldy Sours yarns, and hope to make them "louder and funnier." The bird who tells the stories made his bow in the old Railroad Man's Magazine in April, 1914. This Hiram met Baldy Sours and a certain "Boston Mickey" in Mexico during a scrap between opposing forces of Federal and rebel troops. Boston Mickey was killed. The story of this adventure appeared in a novelette around 1916. Since that time Hiram and Baldy have bobbed up here and there, from time to time, always looking for adventure, and always a little bit leery of the consequences.

I get a great kick out of doing these yarns, and am glad you have liked them. I try to give them right-of-way over other work, because I get a laugh myself out of their desperate attempts to get out of trouble.

With best wishes, I am sincerely yours,

CHARLES W. TYLER.

465 W. Doran St., Glendale, Calif.

ONE OF OUR AUTHORS

James French Dorrance, the well-known author of Western and adventure stories, has a new novel on the market, "The Long Arm of the Mounted." This story was published originally and under a different title in the little sister of "Ace-High," "Ranch Romances," and it made many friends for Mr. Dorrance. We congratulate him upon the fine appearance of his book. We know that it will sell widely.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

KILLER'S CORRAL

A Book-length Western Novel by J. EDWARD LEITHEAD

BLACK DAN O' THE FIGHTIN' HEART

Beginning a New Prize-fight Series by PAUL L. ANDERSON

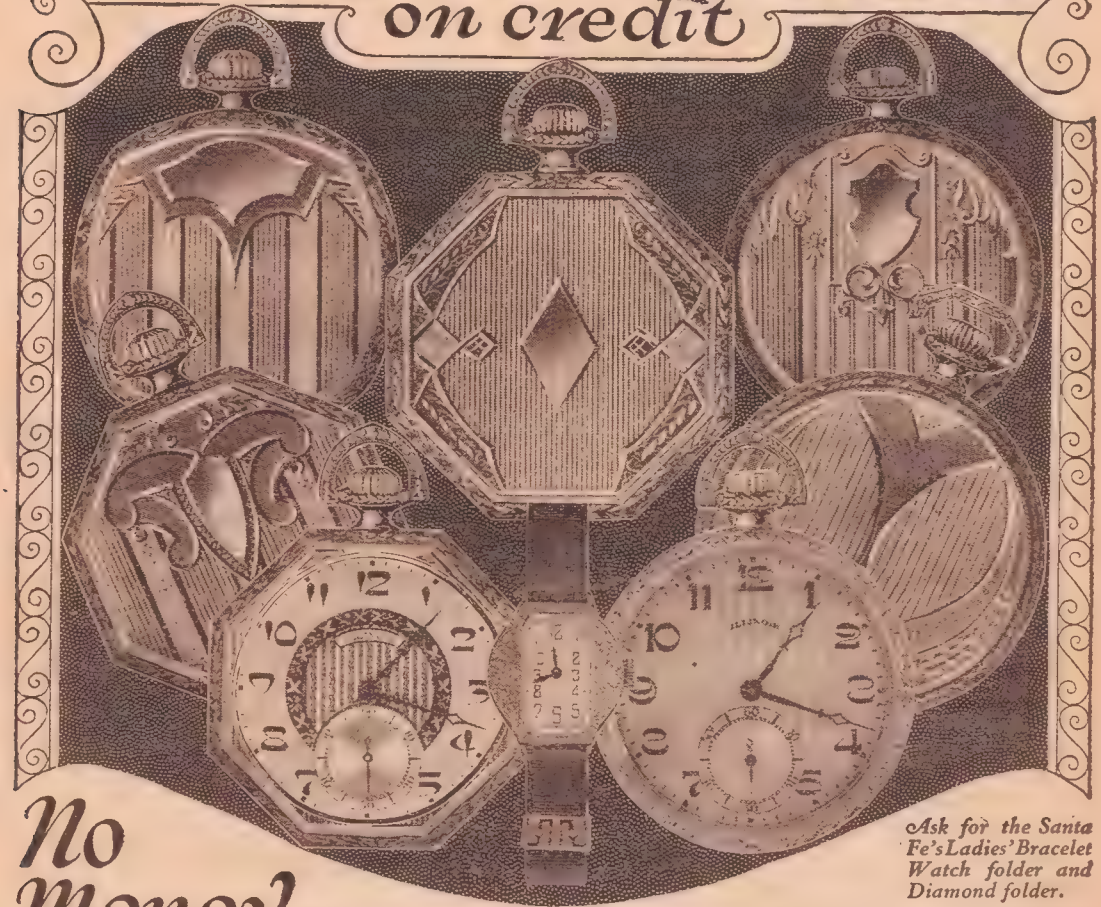
THE MILKY WAY

A Short Story by CLEE WOODS

JINGLE BELLS! JINGLE BELLS

A Hooker Bros. Story by RAY NAFZIGER

21 Jewel Santa Fe Special on credit



Ask for the Santa Fe's Ladies' Bracelet Watch folder and Diamond folder.

No Money Down

WE will send this famous watch direct to you, express prepaid, on FREE Approval. Examine watch and be convinced it's the best watch buy you ever saw. You save ⅓ to ½ your money by purchasing a Santa Fe Special Watch. We trust you—wear watch while paying for it.

Mail Coupon for FREE Watch Book →

Clip the coupon, fill out and receive the FREE WATCH BOOK. All the newest watch case designs in white or green gold, fancy shapes and thin models, are shown. Read our easy payment offer. Select the watch you would like to see; we will send it to you on approval, express prepaid. Wear the watch 30 days FREE. Return at our expense if not fully satisfied.

SANTA FE WATCH COMPANY
555 Thomas Building **Topeka, Kansas**
The Home of the Great Santa Fe Railway

SANTA FE WATCH CO.
555 Thomas Building
Topeka, Kansas

Please send prepaid and without obligation your Watch Book Free, explaining your "No Money Down" Offer on the Santa Fe Special Watch.

Name .....

Address .....

Your Choice $1.00 DOWN

SELECT NOW!
Prompt Delivery—No Red Tape!

Simply pin $1 to this ad and put it in an envelope with your name and address—mail it TODAY. We'll open a charge account for you and your choice of these special bargains will come Prepaid, for your approval and 15 Day Trial. If satisfied, pay balance in 10 equal monthly payments. Otherwise return, and your $1 will be refunded.

WE TRUST YOU

Your credit is good with us. Our Charge Account System is simple, easy and convenient. TRANSACTIONS CONFIDENTIAL. ORDER NOW.

Free Complete booklet with 3,000 bargains in Diamonds, Watches and Jewelry. 10 months to pay on everything.

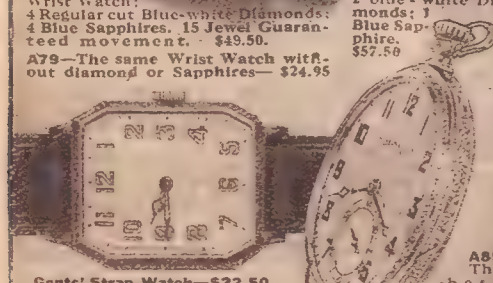
A75—Ladies 18K White Gold Ring; 3 AA1 Quality blue-white Diamonds. Regular $50. value. Price $42.50

A76—Ladies 18K White Gold. AA1 blue-white diamond and regular-cut diamond on each side of shank $52.

A98 18K White Gold Wrist Watch: 4 Regular cut Blue-white Diamonds; 4 Blue Sapphires. 15 Jewel Guaranteed movement. $49.50.

A79—The same Wrist Watch without diamond or Sapphires— $24.95

A77—Gents heavy 18K White Gold ring. 2 blue-white Diamonds; 1 Blue Sapphire. $57.50



Gents' Strap Watch—$22.50
A80—Remarkable value in Gents' Strap Watch, high grade Gold Filled Case. Guaranteed to wear for 10 Years; dependable 15 Jewel Movement, Radium Hands and Dial, Genuine Leather Strap —price $22.50

A81 The best watch value ever offered. 12 size, 21 Jewel, Illinois Watch. Adjusted; 14K Gold Filled Case; will wear for 20 Years. Price $45. Knife and Chain Free

AUTHORIZED CAPITAL $500,000

L·W·SWEET INC.

Dept. 1456-K — 1660 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

Learn AUTO and Tractor TRADE

Become an Auto Expert. I train you in 8 weeks. No apprenticeship. Why work four years for boy's wages? Be a man! No labor unions to join.

I Pay Your R. R. Fare while my short-time Reduced Price training offer lasts. Save ONE-THIRD NOW. You learn with real tools on actual equipment. No text books required. Your money back if not perfectly satisfied.

Earn $75 to $150 Weekly 100,000 experts needed right now to repair America's 20,000,000 cars.

FREE Write for big 64 page book and remarkable offer. Don't wait a minute.

McSWEENY AUTO, TRACTOR and ELECTRICAL SCHOOLS

9th and Walnut Sts. Dept. 384 Cincinnati, O.

Make $2.50 an Hour

YOUR PROFITS IN ADVANCE

FOUR PATENTS

STAY-PREST TROUSER PRESSER sells quick—everywhere. Thousands in use. Salesmen and saleswomen cleaning up. Sells on eight-minute demonstration. Reasonable price. 40% clear profit for you. You take orders. We deliver.

Wonderful New Invention

Puts perfect crease in trousers. Takes out wrinkles and baggy knees. Easy to use—takes less than a minute. Folds into small size. Finely finished. Looks rich. Saves clothes and tailor bills. Every man wants one or two.

Make Big Profits—Others Do

Jack Ames made $24.00 in four hours. Randle sold twenty-five the first day. Mary Roberts made $10.00 in one evening. Others making good in full or spare time. So can you.

FREE Write us quick for free sample offer and full details.

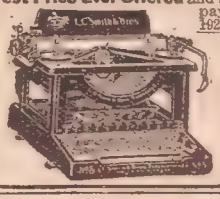
The Getgey-Jung Co., Dept. E-83, G.&J. Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

Lowers Gasoline Cost to 9c per Gallon

Mr. J. A. Stransky, E-350 Stransky Bldg., Pukwana, S. Dak., has invented an automatic and self regulating device which has lowered the gasoline cost of autos to 9c per gallon because they have made from 37 to 57 miles on a gallon of gasoline. The device fits all cars and can be installed in five minutes. Mr. Stransky wants agents and is willing to send a sample at his risk. Write him today.

SENSATIONAL SALE $3

Here is a bargain—a genuine L. C. Smith (the only ball-bearing typewriter made) at the **Lowest Price Ever Offered** and at small monthly payments. All the 1926 improvements; highest quality rebuilt; **guaranteed for 5 yrs.**



AFTER 10 DAY FREE TRIAL

Send No Money

Without delay or red tape, we'll send you this typewriter for a 10 day **FREE** trial. **FREE** Typewriting Course, Tools, Waterproof Cover if *you act now*. Write now for Special Offer and free typewriter manual.

Smith Typewriter Sales Corp.
505-360 E. Grand Ave., Chicago

Be A Bricklayer

Learn bricklaying at home in spare time by the Job Analysis Method. Get ready to make $66 a week and up in few short months. Train with real brick, trowel and mortar in garage, basement or other handy place. Send for FREE book, "The Quick Way to Big Pay Everyday." **National School of Bricklaying, Dept. S-14, 9th and G Streets, Washington, D. C.**

LAW

STUDY AT HOME

Become a lawyer. Legally trained men win high positions and big success in business and public life. Be independent. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training. Earn

$5,000 to $10,000 Annually

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. conferred. LaSalle students found among practicing attorneys of every state. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 108-page "Law Guide" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 675-L Chicago
The World's Largest Business Training Institution

B·W·COOKE
Directing Engineer

Clip coupon for Free Auto Book

BE AN AUTO EXPERT

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST BUSINESS NEEDS YOU

$30 or $40 a week is terrible pay for any man, when **Five Thousand Million Dollars** are paid every year to Auto men for **upkeep alone.** Big Jobs and Big Raises come *amazingly quick.* **Get my Free Book—**

$225 a WEEK for RUMPEL — Think of it—from $35 a week to $225 in a week *quick!* Pick **the line** and **the training** that brings results **quick.** — **in ONLY 10 months**

$215 in a WEEK for TUCKER — Just three months after enrolling—$215 IN A WEEK! That's the kind of QUICK RESULTS **YOU** want! — **in ONLY 3 months**

200% INCREASE for SIEMEN — You TOO need "Job-Way" — **in ONLY 2 months**

"The BEST training in the BEST line brings QUICKEST and BIGGEST RESULTS"

Get RESULTS Quick the B.W. COOKE WAY!

I'll train you at Home

B·W·COOKE AUTO TRAINING

Get my Free Book—I'll tell you about Mr. Rumpel—and Tucker—and Siemens—and hundreds of others—**I'll tell you all about them**—their Addresses, their Ages, their Education, everything about them. I'll give you **smashing proof** of what *YOU* should do with my Training. Hundreds of these ordinary men had no more advantages than you have. Read the fascinating truth in my FREE Book.

Get my FREE Book. I give you $10,000 lesson on the word QUICK!

I Guarantee—that *nowhere else on earth* can you get this training that shows such astonishing QUICK and TREMENDOUS RESULTS. For your Quick Success get this QUICK TRAINING in the Gigantic Auto Business, where tremendous sums are paid men, making such astonishing **Quick and Big Results** so plentiful.

4 BIG OUTFITS INCLUDED FREE of extra cost

Tools, Test Bench, Radio Receiving Set. **All equipment included Free of extra charge.** Also 293 wiring diagram charts. Act quick. Clip coupon for full details.

I GIVE YOU FACTS!

16 SMASHING GUARANTEES plus AMAZING PROOF are what I give you. *Just read my book.* There's a mighty REASON why I DO get such QUICK RESULTS for so many of my students. It is *Practical* Training from a *practical* Engineer. I know what training you need, no matter whether you are YOUNG or OLD, EDUCATED or POORLY EDUCATED, EXPERIENCED or WITHOUT A DAY'S AUTO EXPERIENCE—That Training I give you.

"Quick" IS THE VITAL WORD

To make $1000 **SLOW** in say 5 years means **FAILURE.** To make $1000 **QUICK** in a month means **SUCCESS.** *QUICK* is the dominating, all important word that is the Father of the word **SUCCESS.** Get My QUICK training. Of course my Training includes ALL ELECTRICAL, ALL MECHANICAL—WELDING, BRAZING, VULCANIZING—it's complete. Of course, I give you LIFE-TIME CONSULTATION SERVICE and my students say it's wonderful—but on top of all this, I give you a valuable Business Course—Salesmanship, Advertising, Bookkeeping, Buying—everything. The best of Auto Engineers on my Pay Roll help me to help you, with backing of Auto Industry makes all this possible.

Go Into Business

My Free Book, AUTO FACTS, shows how I've put man after man in the Auto business for himself—**QUICK**—*just a few weeks after enrolling!* Amazing rewards are everywhere for men TRAINED MY WAY, to be their own Bosses—own their own Shops. Very little capital needed to start.

One Million Auto Experts BADLY NEEDED

Over a million trained men are needed it is rated to replace "tinkerers" and untrained "guessers." Farms, Villages, Cities offer BIG MONEY opportunities QUICK. *Stay Home.* Keep your job—I'll show you the way to fatten your present pay *right away*, **in the earliest weeks of your training.** Hundreds virtually get my training for **nothing!** See all this in my Big Book.

I Help You to GOOD JOBS

ALL YOUR LIFE, this Great Auto Institution, backs you up with Employment Service *as often* and *as long* as you want it absolutely at no extra cost. My fine Automotive Magazine "POPULAR AUTOMOTIVE NEWS" is also sent you free of extra cost. Free book tells all.

Action makes dreams come true, **QUICK!**

Get My Free Book. I Train You in Your Spare Time, At Home

When you look at training—*look* for its *Quick Results. Good training can show you QUICK RESULTS* Act quick and I'll send you Free my remarkable book, "Auto Facts." See how in 3, 6, 10 and 15 weeks many students' earnings jump. Judge as your good judgment tells you. **BUT ACT!**

Big Auto Book Free! —GET IT

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

B. W. COOKE, Directing Engineer
CHICAGO MOTOR TRAINING CORPORATION
1916 Sunnyside Avenue, Dept. 535, CHICAGO, ILL.

Send me FREE Auto Book and proof that you will show me the QUICK WAY toward a BIG JOB and a RAISE IN PAY. Also send your 4 Outfits Offer. It is understood that this obligates me in no way and no salesman is to call on me.

.....Name

.....Address

B. W. COOKE DIRECTING ENGINEER

CHICAGO MOTOR TRAINING CORPORATION
1916 Sunnyside Avenue Dept. 535, CHICAGO

"The Finest Trombone I've ever played"—

THIS opinion, expressed by thousands of owners of King Saxophones, Trumpets, Trombones and other band instruments, is a tribute to the exacting standards to which "Kings" are built. Every instrument is true in pitch and scale,—is easy to play and has a beautiful tone quality.

Get a "King" and turn your spare hours into profitable pleasure by playing for dances, parties and other engagements.

Free Trial—Easy Payments

You can have 10 days free trial to prove to your own satisfaction that you can easily learn to play and that a "King" is the finest instrument you can obtain. Convenient payments as low as $5.00 a month are extended in purchasing. Other band instruments accepted as part payment.

Send for a Catalog

If you play any instrument or are thinking of getting one, send for the "King" catalog before purchasing. This catalog will tell you how "Kings" are built, explain the various exclusive features which make "Kings" the finest instruments you can obtain.

THE H. N. WHITE CO., 5212-75 Superior Ave., Cleveland
Manufacturers of KING Band Instruments

The H. N. White Co., 5212-75 Superior Ave., Cleveland, O.
Kindly send me free your latest catalog on KING
_____ (Instrument)
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ *State* _____

High School Course in 2 Years

This simplified, complete High School Course, specially prepared for home study by leading professors, meets all requirements for entrance to college, business, and leading professions.

20 Other Courses

Over 200 noted Engineers, Business Men, and Educators helped prepare the special instruction which you need for success. No matter what your inclinations may be, you can't hope to succeed without specialized training. Let us give you the practical training you need.

American School
Drexel Ave. and 58th St.
Dept. H-568, Chicago

Money Back When You Finish If Not Satisfied

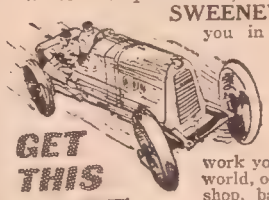
American School, Dept. H-568, Drexel Av. and 58th St., Chicago
Send me full information on the subject checked and how you will help me win success in that line.

.....Architect	.....Electrical Engineer
.....Building Contractor	.....General Education
.....Automobile Engineer	.....Lawyer
.....Civil Engineer	.....Mach. Shop Practice
.....Structural Engineer	.....Mechanical Engineer
.....Business Manager	.....Steam Engineer
.....C. P. A. & Auditor	.....Sanitary and Heating
.....Bookkeeper	.....Surveyor & Mapping
.....Draftsman & Designer	.....High School Graduate

Name.....
Address.....

Men Wanted

If you are mechanically inclined write me quick. 75,000 men tell you THE SWEENEY SYSTEM trains you in a few weeks for fine auto jobs—chauffeur, welder, repair man—$50.00 a week and up. You work here with tools not books. Get the facts how easy it is to make big money doing work you like, to travel, see the world, own your own garage, tire shop, battery station anywhere. Simply send name today for big 64-page catalog and special offer. Actual photos. Lists high-paid jobs. No colored students accepted.



GET THIS FREE BOOK

LEARN A TRADE—Sweeney
AUTOMOTIVE & ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
2553 SWEENEY BLDG. KANSAS CITY, MO

$1 a Week

for Your Choice of Any Standard Make TYPEWRITER

Never before a typewriter offer like this! ONLY $1.00 WEEKLY and you can own an Underwood, Royal, L. C. Smith, Remington or any standard typewriter at lowest prices in years.

We will ship typewriter to you on **TEN DAYS' TRIAL.** Every machine completely re-manufactured by the famous "Young Process" giving longest, satisfactory service and appearance like new — backed up by our **FIVE YEAR WRITTEN GUARANTEE.**

FREE CATALOG fully illustrated and with complete information about typewriters sent on request —no obligation whatever. **WRITE TODAY.**

Ask for Agency Offer—Agents Wanted Everywhere.

YOUNG TYPEWRITER COMPANY
654 W. RANDOLPH ST., Dept. 1788, CHICAGO, ILL.

Clear Your Skin!

Your Skin can be Quickly Cleared of Pimples, Blackheads, Acne Eruptions on the face or body, Barbers Itch, Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin.

FREE Write today for my FREE Booklet, "*A Clear-Tone Skin*," telling how I cured myself after being afflicted for over fifteen years.

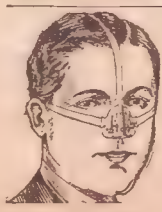
$1,000 Cold Cash says I can clear your skin of the above blemishes.
E. S. GIVENS, 112 Chemical Building, KANSAS CITY, MO.

LEARN Electricity

Great Shops of Coyne —complete in 3 months. Massive electrical equipment.

Free Railroad Fare

Enter anytime. Special limited offer. Auto and Radio Courses FREE. *Send for big free catalog Now!*
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL—Dept. 6105
1300-1310 West Harrison Street, Chicago, Illinois



A Perfect Looking Nose CAN EASILY BE YOURS

Trados Model No. 25 corrects now all ill-shaped noses quickly, painlessly, permanently and comfortably at home. It is the only noseshaping appliance of precise adjustment and a safe and guaranteed patent device that will actually give you a perfect looking nose. Over 90,000 satisfied users. For years recommended by physicians. 16 years of experience in manufacturing Nose Shapers is at your service. **Model 25 Junior for children.** Write for testimonials and free booklet, which tells you how to obtain a perfect looking nose.

M. TRILETY, Pioneer Noseshaping Specialist
Dept. 2638 Binghamton, N. Y.

WANTED
U S RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS

TRAVEL ON GOVERNMENT PAY
COMMENCE $1900 YEAR
QUICK RAISE TO BIG PAY

Many other U. S. Government Jobs open to Men and Women 18 up.

POSTOFFICE CLERKS — CITY MAIL CARRIERS
INCOME TAX AUDITORS — CLERKS AT WASHINGTON, D. C.
STEADY POSITIONS

These are steady positions. Strikes, poor business conditions, lockouts or politics will not affect them. U. S. Government employees get their pay for full twelve months every year. There is no such thing as "HARD TIMES" in the U. S. Government Service.

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS

Railway Postal Clerks now get $1900 the first year, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. $79.16 each pay day. Their pay is increased to a maximum of $2700 a year. $112.50 each pay day. They get extra allowance for hotel expenses when away from home.

PAID VACATIONS

Railway Postal Clerks, like all Government employees, are given a yearly vacation of 15 working days (about 18 days). On runs they usually work three days and have three days off duty or in the same proportion. During this off duty and vacation, their pay continues just as though they were working. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension. As Railway Postal Clerks are continually traveling, they have an excellent chance to see the country. They are furnished with a railroad pass.

CITY MAIL CARRIERS—POST OFFICE CLERKS

Clerks and Carriers commence at $1700 a year and automatically increase $100 a year to $2100 with further increase to $2300. They also have 15 days vacation. Examinations are frequently held in the larger cities. City residence is unnecessary.

CLERKS AT WASHINGTON, D. C.

(Open to men or women 18 or over)

Salary $1140 to $1860 a year. Required for pleasant clerical work in the various departments and offices at Washington, D. C.

WHAT WILL YOU EARN FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?

Compare these conditions with your present or your prospective condition, perhaps changing positions frequently, kicking around from post to pillar, no chance in sight for PERMANENT employment; frequently out of a position and the year's average salary very low. DO YOU EARN $1900 EVERY YEAR? HAVE YOU ANY ASSURANCE THAT A FEW YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL GET $2700 OR MORE A YEAR, EVERY YEAR?

GET FREE LIST OF POSITIONS

Fill out the coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—now, at once. DO IT NOW—This investment of two cents for a postage stamp may result in you getting a U. S. Government Job.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. P269
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

Kindly rush to me, entirely free of charge (1) a full description of the position checked below; (2) specimen examination questions; (3) Free copy of illustrated book, "U. S. Government Positions and How to Get Them"; (4) A list of the U. S. Government Jobs now obtainable.

Railway Postal Clerk	($1900-$2700)
Post Office Clerk	($1700-$2300)
City Mail Carrier	($1700-$2100)
Rural Mail Carrier	($2100-$3300)
Clerk at Washington, D. C.	($1140-$1860)
Income Tax Auditor	($2040-$3000)

Name.....

Address.....

Use This Coupon Before You Mislay It—Write or Print Plainly

. . . and, perhaps you, too, due to the lack of money, time and education necessary to master a trade, wonder what to get into *quickly* and make the most out of. Haven't you *overlooked* the very thing you are looking for? 60,000 Moler graduates *know* Modern Barbering is easy to learn, *quick* to earn, *clean* and FASCINATING! FIND OUT! Write for catalog "N."

Address the Branch
of the MOLER SYSTEM OF COLLEGES nearest you.
(Street address not needed)

Chicago, Ill.	New Orleans, La.	Minneapolis, Minn.
New York, N.Y.	Omaha, Nebr.	Seattle, Wash.
St. Louis, Mo.	Milwaukee, Wis.	Los Angeles, Cal.
Kansas City, Mo.	Atlanta, Ga.	Salt Lake City, Utah
Cincinnati, Ohio	Fargo, N. D.	San Francisco, Cal.
Cleveland, Ohio	Memphis, Tenn.	Tacoma, Wash.
Detroit, Mich.	Dallas, Tex.	Toronto, Ont., Can.
Denver, Colo.	Houston, Tex.	Winnipeg, Man., Can.
	San Antonio, Tex.	

Learn to Fly

SWEENEY SYSTEM

of PRACTICAL AIRPLANE MECHANICS opens up a world of opportunities for young men. The *Sweeney System* has no planes to sell, and sticks strictly to teaching both ground work and pilotage. Sweeney Airport approved by U. S. Air Mail Service as one of the best and safest fields in the U. S. All the resources of this *Million Dollar School* insure you the best, most practical instruction. Mechanics earn $50 to $150 a week. Flyers up to $500.

SEND NAME TODAY for full details of this aviation mechanical course and photographs of planes and equipment actually used; also full information as to the commercial end of flying and opportunities for young men.

LEARN TO FLY BY FLYING

Sweeney

SCHOOL of AVIATION
2502 SWEENEY BLDG. KANSAS CITY, MO.

Adjusted to the Second
Adjusted to Temperatures
Adjusted to Isochronism
Adjusted to Positions
21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels
25 Year Gold Strata Case

21 JEWEL BURLINGTON

A *masterpiece*—so accurate that the men's watch is in use on practically every vessel of the U. S. Navy. And the Burlington line is *complete*—with styles and designs for everyone!

ROCK BOTTOM PRICES

This aristocrat among watches is sold on easy payments at rock bottom prices. Write *Today* for the "Burlington Book" picturing in colors the most complete assortment of watch styles and designs ever shown under one cover!

BURLINGTON WATCH CO., Dept. 15-65
19th St. and Marshall Blvd. Chicago, Ill.

Free

$20.00 Tenor Banjo

When You Enroll

GENUINE professional tenor banjo—is absolutely free when you enroll in Charles McNeil's famous home-study banjo course. It is a handsome, full-size instrument, worth $20 or more at any store.

Phonograph Records Included

Earn Big Money—Quick!

With this course it is easy to earn big money. Simple as ABC—yet the course has all technical requirements. Includes phonograph records, demonstrating jazz strokes, breaks and chords, played by CharlesMcNeil, 5 years with Isham Jones-Brunswick Recording Orchestra. Easy payments. Write for free book. *Charles McNeil, Director.*

Chicago Tenor Banjo Institute
1621 Lincoln St. Dept. 1975 Chicago, Ill.

No Joke to be Bald!

Grow New Hair Quick

Let Me PROVE It To You FREE

No apparatus—no useless massage. A simple, quick, NATURAL treatment which *must succeed or you pay nothing.*

Write VREELANDS
70 Euclid-Windsor Building Cleveland, Ohio

I Offer You $8.00 a Day and a

Write quick for new proposition. We offer $8.00 a day and a new Chevrolet Coach, for demonstrating and taking orders for Comer All-Weather Topcoats and Raincoats. Spare time. No experience required. Sample outfit free. Write now.

COMER MFG. CO., Dept. K-88 DAYTON, O.

30 Days' Free Trial

Select from 44 Styles, colors and sizes, famous Ranger bicycles. Delivered free on approval, *express prepaid*, at Factory Prices. You can easily save $10 to $25 on your bicycle. Prices $21.50 and up.

$5 a Month on any Ranger if desired. Parents girls can easily earn small monthly payments. Pay as you ride. best quality, at factory prices, *express prepaid.*

Tires Lamps, wheels and equipment, low prices. Send No Money, do business *direct* with makers.

Mead CYCLE COMPANY DEPT. B-43 CHICAGO

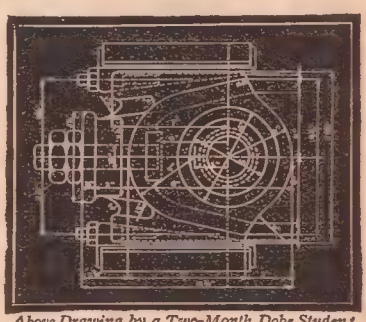
Write today for free Ranger Catalog, factory prices and marvelous easy payment terms

DRAFTING PAYS BEST!

Beginners Earn $50 and $65 a Week or More! Junior Draftsmen $400 a Month; Chiefs, $800

There's *big* money in drafting. Make no mistake about that! My former students are getting all the way from $250 a month as juniors, to $833 a month as chiefs.

Here is your chance to take up drafting. Learn practical draftsmanship at home—but under the daily direction of Chief Draftsman Dobe—the man who has made finished draftsmen of thousands of men, young and old—men who had no previous training, or even the average amount of schooling. Give him your evenings for just a few months, and you'll be ready for almost any drafting job that offers. Begin in time to get all your tools without a dollar's extra outlay! Note offer:



Above Drawing by a Two-Month Dobe Student

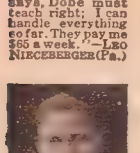
PAYING POSITIONS loom up almost as soon as you are enrolled in a Dobe class! We receive requests *daily* for junior men—for men only partly through our course. "We'll take a *beginner*," some concerns write us, "so long as he is a Dobe trained man and has begun *right!*" Furthermore, a lot of our students are willing to carry on special work for pay, right while their lessons go on.

But why try to tell you here, all the wonderful *facts* you'll find in my new, big book, Successful Draftsmanship? Full of actual information, fully illustrated, the biggest and most fascinating book ever published on the subject! Send for it in time to get your complete, lifetime drafting outfit *free of any extra cost whatever!* Coupon below.

Money-Making Tools

A Professional Drafting Set, and All Supplies Furnished!

"My new chief says, Dobe must teach right; I can handle everything so far. They pay me $65 a week."—LEO NIECEBERGER (Pa.)



"Just been made chief and got a good boost in pay. Your course has the goods."—WM. G. HAZLETT (Col.)

Scores of engineering firms and manufacturers recruit their draftsmen from my classes. I haven't enough men now—and a busier season is coming. Therefore, I make this offer to get *action:* a beautiful set of imported drafting instruments, all rules and tools, *and a drafting table*, free of any extra expense to those who join up at once. You needn't decide now, but get your name in at once for this free offer! Clip coupon, and *mail it!* I want to caution you that this is a limited offer—it isn't one I can afford to keep on making!

WHY DRAFTING PAYS It's in the drafting room that the big ideas come—and the big money. Have you ever known a draftsman who didn't like his work? Or one who ever had to look for work? If a hundred dollars a week sounds big—yes, or $150—you aren't in the right line of business! Get into a broader field—the broadest of all. That's drafting. Investigate the tremendous field of drafting before you decide on any line of work or career. Drafting fits in with almost any kind of work you can think of.

IN 1926 I predict a shortage in draftsmen. Last Spring, every sort of inducement was being offered men who could draft. Scores of our "boys" stepped right into fine jobs the week they had completed our course. This year will see still greater demand for draftsmen—with a big building boom and big production all over U. S. and abroad.

Engineering, or Mining—All Need Draftsmen!

Good for Tools

CHIEF DRAFTSMAN DOBE
1951 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Dept 15-35

Please send FREE and POSTPAID, without obligation, your new, fully illustrated book, Successful Draftsmanship, complete information, terms, etc., *in time for free tool offer.*

Name.....*Age*.....

Address.....

.....

Be Happier!

Popularity—new friends—money-making opportunities come to those who can play!

You Can Play a Tune in Ten Minutes

on your FAVORITE STRINGED INSTRUMENT. No knowledge of music needed. No expensive lessons. No weeks of tiresome practice. Play tunes from the start—play at once and surprise and astonish your friends. **Amazing new invention** makes it easy for thousands to play Ukulele, Banjo Ukulele, Tenor Banjo, Guitar, Mandolin who couldn't learn by old method.

Trixie Friganza, famous Vaudeville Star wrote: "I played a tune in 2 minutes and never touched a stringed instrument before." John A. Cruser: "I was skeptical about anyone playing tunes instantly but have changed my ideas completely." W. B. Matthis: "Your advertisement didn't tell the half of it. Your Player sure helped me hand my friends a great surprise." Mrs. A. Kasen: "My friends and I play wonderful tunes. The more we play the better it gets."

Astonish Your Friends

Of course, you have always wanted to play. Do not delay—it is so easy—so wonderfully easy that we guarantee success or it costs you nothing.

Free Book! If you want more popularity—more fun from life—new friends—money-making opportunities—if you want to play tunes at once—send today for a free book about **Instant Playing stringed instruments.** Soon you, too, can know the joy of making your own music. Instant Playing Instruments are sold complete or the Instant Player can be attached to your own stringed instrument in a jiffy. Send the coupon today.

FERRY & CO., Dept. 8045, Chicago, Illinois

Mail coupon today

FERRY & CO., Dept. 2285, Chicago, Ill.

Send me free book telling how I can get more fun out of life, make more friends, have greater opportunities for getting ahead by learning to play my favorite stringed instrument in 10 minutes. Also catalog of special musical instrument bargains. No obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

LUCK

All around you there is abundant Success, Wealth and Happiness. Get Your Share. The "LUCKY SEVEN" Secret Rules are free to all who wear this Rare and beautiful Talisman Ring. On each side of this Odd and Charming Ring is moulded the figure of Fortuna—The "Goddess of Luck". Ancient belief, that her emblem brings luck and success to wearer in Love, Games, Business, Health and everything. Genuine 14-K Antique Gold S. Ring, mounted with one carat Blazing Blue White Mexican Im. Diamond. Guaranteed 20 years. Send strip paper to show finger size and we will send you this wonderful ring. When it arrives pay the postman only $3.95. Nothing more to pay. Yours to keep, wear and enjoy forever. Wear 7 days—follow the 7 rules that we send you. If not satisfied your money quickly returned. Address

Radio-FlashDiamond ImportingCo., St. PaulMinn. Dept. 25L

Tobacco Habit BANISHED

Let Us Help You

No craving for tobacco in any form after you begin taking Tobacco Redeemer. Don't try to quit the tobacco habit unaided. It's often a losing fight against heavy odds and may mean a serious shock to the nervous system. **Let us help the tobacco habit to quit YOU.** It will quit you, if you will just take **Tobacco Redeemer** according to directions. It is marvelously quick and thoroughly reliable.

Not a Substitute

Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind. It is in no sense a substitute for tobacco. After finishing the treatment you have absolutely no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. It makes not a particle of difference how long you have been using tobacco, how much you use or in what form you use it—whether you smoke cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chew plug or fine cut or use snuff, **Tobacco Redeemer** will **positively** remove all craving for tobacco in any form in a few days. This we absolutely guarantee in every case or money refunded.

Write today for our free booklet showing the deadly effect of tobacco upon the human system and **positive proof** that **Tobacco Redeemer** will quickly free you of the habit.

Newell Pharmacal Company,
Dept. 793 Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

"GEMS of SCIENCE"

Ideal for Entertainments

Visible, growing "lifeless plants," matchless fire, iceless freezing mixtures, fireless smoke, synthetic perfumes, dyes, pigments and resins, mosaic gold, Pharoh's Serpents, luminous paint and many others described clearly how to prepare. A high-class collection of fascinating phenomena, written by a **Bachelor of Science and College Teacher.** Suitable for novices and experienced in science.

Price 25c (coin)

OXIDITE MFG. CO., Dept R, Wakefield, Mass.

Looks Like a Real AUTOMATIC $1.48

Protect yourself from toughs and hold-up men. Most amazing automatic 4½ in. long; gun-metal finish. Can't tell from real automatic until you pull the trigger and presto! you have Opera Glass, Pocket Mirror, Magnifying Glass, Telescope, Reading Glass, Mirror, Sun Dial, Compass, etc. Loads of fun; useful, instructive. A real protector.

MAKES 10 USEFUL ARTICLES

SEND NO MONEY

Just send name. On arrival of "Automatic" deposit with Postman $1.48 plus a few pennies postage. Satisfaction guaranteed or deposit refunded. Supply limited. Order now. Big Bargain Catalog sent FREE.

FERRY & CO., Dept. 9285J 3224 N. Halsted St., Chicago, Ill.

GET RID OF YOUR FAT

Free Trial Treatment

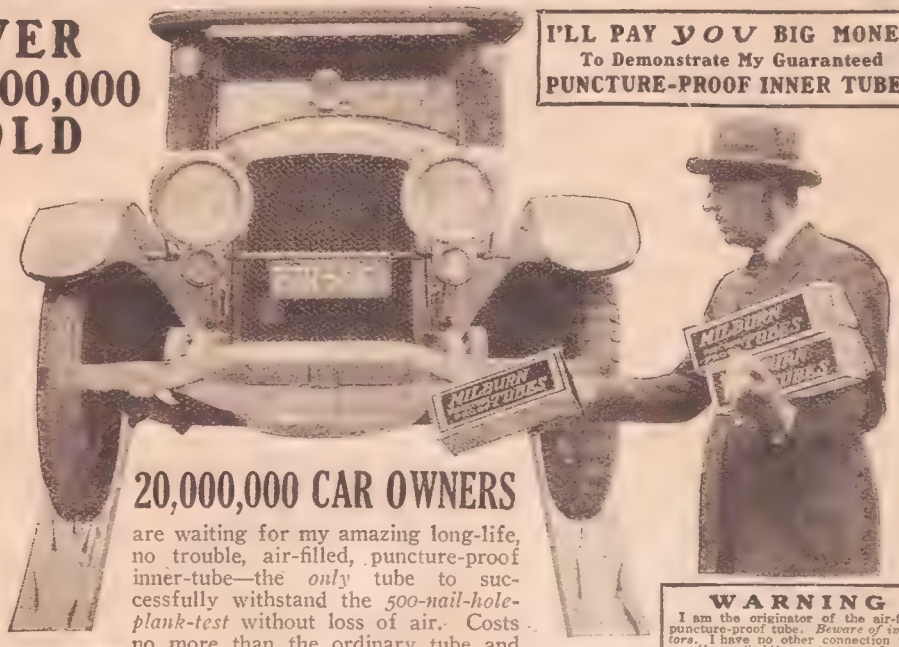
Sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. I have successfully reduced thousands of persons, without starvation diet or burdensome exercise, often at a rapid rate. Let me send you proof at my expense.

Dr. R. NEWMAN, Licensed Physician
State of New York, 286 Fifth Avenue, N. Y., Desk M

500 Punctures Without Loss of Air

OVER 1,000,000 SOLD

I'LL PAY *YOU* BIG MONEY
To Demonstrate My Guaranteed PUNCTURE-PROOF INNER TUBES



20,000,000 CAR OWNERS

are waiting for my amazing long-life, no trouble, air-filled, puncture-proof inner-tube—the *only* tube to successfully withstand the *500-nail-hole-plank-test* without loss of air. Costs no more than the ordinary tube and is sold under a *positive, money-back guarantee.*

WARNING
I am the originator of the air-filled puncture-proof tube. *Beware of imitators.* I have no other connection with any "so-called" puncture-proof tube.

MAKES MOTORING A PLEASURE — DOUBLES TIRE MILEAGE

Users of *Milburn Puncture-Proof Tubes* everywhere are enjoying the easy riding performance of the air-filled tube *without the annoyance of punctures and slow leaks.* And a tire mileage increase from 12,000 to 15,000 miles. Many users report 30,000 miles (double mileage) without removing a tire from the wheel.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

We hereby agree to *refund to any purchaser* the full amount paid for any *Milburn Puncture-Proof Tube* that leaks air when punctured by anything not larger than a twenty-penny spike. We also guarantee that casings will last much longer and give much greater mileage where *Milburn Puncture-Proof Tubes are used.*

PROOF

J. D. Cooper—"I have made 30,000 miles with my Milburn Puncture-Proof Tubes and have not as yet removed a rim or casing and my casings are in excellent condition."

J. T. Berdahl—"Have been using Milburn Tubes since 1922, driving every day. Have pulled out any number of nails without loss of air."

S. C. Winfrey—"I have driven 600 nails in one of my Milburn Puncture-Proof Tubes without loss of air."

J. S. MacElroy—"Received the shipment of 200 Milburn Puncture-Proof Tubes and find them as represented. Hope to send you another 200 tube order soon."

W. H. Rodman—"I wish to praise your Milburn Puncture-Proof Tubes. They can't be beat. I drove 13 nails in one tube and I haven't put any air in it since. Everyone is wild over your tubes."

TEST THE MILBURN AT *MY* RISK

You'll be delighted. And you'll realize how easily orders are secured. Sales experience is not necessary to coin money selling the *Milburn. Positively the biggest tube value obtainable.* Absolutely non-competitive. I control all basic patents. Car owners buy on demonstration. It makes no difference what tires they use or what car they drive.

$178.56 IN 6 DAYS

That's what A. Murphy made the first six days out with Milburn Puncture-Proof Tubes. "I made $14.04 in ten minutes with your tubes."—Chas. Clayton. "The first three days out selling your tubes I cleaned up $58.50."—J. C. Jerves.

FREE TUBE OFFER

Stop working for others. Get into business for yourself selling **Milburn Puncture-Proof Tubes** and you, too, can make **big** money. My **No-Capital-Direct-From-Factory-Sales-Plan** makes it easily possible. Line up your territory rights on this whirlwind seller—full or part time—**NOW.** National advertising campaign just starting. Big season here. **Act quick.** Clip and mail the FREE TUBE COUPON—NOW. References: Industrial State Bank, Baker State Bank, Chicago.

M. E. Milburn, Pres.
Milburn Puncture-Proof Tube Co., Inc.
103-336 West 47th St., Chicago, Illinois

MAIL NOW

M. E. Milburn, Pres. **FREE Tube Coupon**
Milburn Puncture-Proof Tube Co., Inc.
103-336 W. 47th Street, Chicago, Ill.

If the money-making opportunity is [illegible] I am interested in receiving [illegible] at I [illegible] a sample of the [illegible] Puncture-Proof Tube. Without [illegible] commercial name [illegible] about Free Tube Coupon [illegible] owners.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

DIAMONDS

LOFTIS BROS. & CO. Since 1858 — Stores in Leading Cities

THE OLD RELIABLE ORIGINAL CREDIT JEWELERS

Dept. N-163 108 N. State Street Chicago, Ill.

CASH or CREDIT

It's Easy to Own a Genuine Diamond Ring

Our immense stocks include thousands of the latest mountings in platinum and solid gold, and set with brilliant blue white Diamonds of exceptional quality. Order today and get your ring at once. Pay 10% down—we ship goods immediately. Balance weekly, semi-monthly, or monthly as convenient.

No.28 $37.50 **$1.00** a wk.

No.31 $187.50 **$4.70** a wk.

No.27 $69 **$1.75** a wk.

No.30 $97.50 **$2.45** a wk.

Big Diamond Book FREE! Write for It Today!

Wrist Watch

14-K white gold hand engraved case. Fancy wing ends. Silver dial. High grade 15-Jewel movement, $25. $2.50 down and $1.00 a wk.

17-Jewel Elgin

No.15—Green gold, 17-Jewel Elgin Watch; 25-Year Quality Case; 12 Size; Gilt Dial; $30. $3 down and $1.00 a wk.

Wedding Rings

No. 824—The "Elite" $7.50 18-k white gold . . . Set with 3 Diamonds, $22.50; 5 Diamonds, $32.50; 7 Diamonds, $42.50; 9 Diamonds, $52.50; 12 Diamonds, $67.50.

You Can Play It

If It's a Buescher Saxophone

We give 3 free lessons with each new instrument. They start you. Teach yourself. It's great fun practicing because you learn so quickly. Even though you have failed with some other instrument, you *can* learn the Buescher Saxophone. And it will make you the most popular person in your set. 6 days' free trial in your own home, any instrument. No obligations. Easy terms if you decide to buy. Send now for beautiful free literature. A postal brings liberal proposition. Address:

Buescher Band Instrument Co. (5x)
1485 Buescher Block Elkhart, Indiana

AGENTS

Some Seller at $1.50

Looks Like $5.00 Worth Gives You 75c Profit!

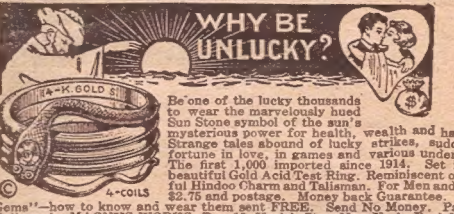
This Is What Gets the Coin

YOU should see this "Super 8" Package. Also our 11 piece Assortment selling at $2.00 with 2 piece Carving Set FREE to each Customer. No fancy talk—Experience Unnecessary. Harris in W. Va. sold 800 in 6 weeks.

Profit Over $100 a Week

MAKE BIG PROFITS right from the start. What more could you ask while introducing line of Soaps, Toilet Articles, Food Specialties, Polishes, Remedies, etc. at ATTRACTIVE PRICES? 100% Profit. 250 Products—All Repeaters. 30 years on Market. Write today for Ill. Circulars and UNIQUE SALES PLANS. Act NOW.

E. M. DAVIS CO. Dept. 8741 Chicago, Illinois



Be one of the lucky thousands to wear the marvelously hued Sun Stone symbol of the sun's mysterious power for health, wealth and happiness. Strange tales abound of lucky strikes, sudden good fortune in love, in games and various undertakings. The first 1,000 imported since 1914. Set in weird beautiful Gold Acid Test Ring. Reminiscent of powerful Hindoo Charm and Talisman. For Men and women, $2.75 and postage. Money back Guarantee. "Lucky Gems"—how to know and wear them sent FREE. Send No Money. Pay When Delivered. MAGNUS WORKS, Box 12, Varick Sta., New York, Desk N. S.

a Better Job NOW!

Why take small pay from uncertain jobs? Why be bounced around from this to that, and not know whether you are going to have a job tomorrow or not? You can change all that. Learn a trade. Know Autos—how to repair them, and take advantage of the countless opportunities to make money. Pave the way for a business of your own—a business that can make you independent for life. You can do it with a few weeks' training at the Michigan State Automobile School—the great auto-trade school in the heart of the auto industry. Be a Trained Man—Successful! More than 18 million cars in use, thousands more made daily. All need service by trained men. More men needed for good jobs. More garages, electric service stations, tire battery and welding shops needed. This means amazing opportunities for men who start now. Small capital needed, no experience. Fit *yourself* now to make big money.

COME TO THE AUTO CENTER

Learn by Factory Endorsed Methods

Here you have wonderful advantages. Study autos, trucks, engines, auto electricity, tractors. All on best equipment, up-to-date. Many new cars: expert instructors; a thorough course that slights nothing. Inspect the great auto plants. These great companies approve this school. Get factory endorsed training at the Auto

positions open. Here's your chance to be in- Write today for full information about Detroit the most money.

TATE TOMOBILE SCHOOL
Detroit, Michigan

Cost $1.50—Your Profit $1.44

Ten orders daily easy.
No experience needed, samples and information free.

World Monogram Co., Dept. 154, Newark, N.J.

Learn Photography at HOME

Earn $3,000 to $10,000 a year. Prepare quickly during spare time. Also earn while you learn. New easy method. Nothing else like it. Send at once for free book, "Opportunities in Modern Photography" and full particulars. Special offer open now.

International Studios, Inc., Dept. 4665, 3601 Michigan Av., Chicago, U.S.A.

FREE Let Us Help You QUIT TOBACCO

We give free information how to conquer the tobacco habit easily. Permanent results guaranteed.

Anti-Tobacco League, Box A Omaha, Neb.

Ad pages 11 through 16
Are Missing

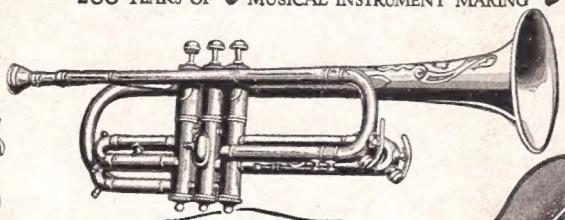
Trade Mark Registered

WURLITZER

200 YEARS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MAKING

Wurlitzer Saxophones

The most popular of all wind instruments. Improvements in fingering and special conical bore make Wurlitzer Saxophones the easiest to play and unusual for rich tone values. Blows and fingers so easily that playing is as simple as whistling a tune.



Wurlitzer Cornets

Noted for accurate pitch, and clear even tones in both soft and loud playing. Valve pistons individually ground to insure smooth, easy action and absence of leakage. Once "lipping" is mastered very little practice is required to play simple band music.

Wurlitzer Violins

The Wurlitzer collection of Old Violins is internationally famous. Wurlitzer modern violins are made by experts, and accurately patterned after Stradivarius, Guarnerius, and other famous models. We especially urge young people to take up the violin.

Wurlitzer Stringed Instruments

Wurlitzer banjos guitars, mandolins, ukeleles, etc. are made with particular attention to close fit at all joints, to give true vibration and full resonance. Stringed instruments are the easiest of all for beginners to "pick up" —some can become good players almost without effort.

Any Musical Instrument

On Trial

WURLITZER will send you ***any instrument*** for a week's trial in your own home. No obligation to buy — no expense for the trial — you do not risk a penny. Wurlitzer instruments are known the world over for artistic quality and excellence of workmanship. Used by the greatest musicians, bands, and orchestras. The house of Wurlitzer has made the finest musical instruments for over 200 years.

Easy Payments

Payments are conveniently arranged in small monthly sums — a few cents a day will pay. All instruments to you at lowest factory prices. Special combination offers on complete musical outfits — velvet lined case, all accessories, self-instructor, etc.—everything you need at practically the cost of the instrument alone.

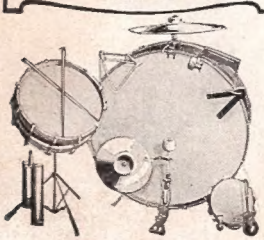
Send for New Illustrated Catalog!

The greatest musical catalog ever published! Over 3,000 articles — every known instrument described and illustrated—many of them shown in full colors. No matter where you live, you can buy Wurlitzer instruments direct by mail the same as at any of the 27 Wurlitzer stores.

Send the coupon today!

Wurlitzer Trap Drum Outfits

Every conceivable drummer's trap is included in the Wurlitzer outfits—nothing is lacking. A sense of rhythm usually means that playing the trap drums will be almost instinctive.



Wurlitzer Trombones

Tone remarkable for sonority and clearness, absolutely pure in all registers. Slides are drawn to a great hardness and perfect line, insuring easy action and perfect intonation.

Copyright 1922.
The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co.

The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co., Dept. 1993

117 E. 4th St., Cincinnati —329 So. Wabash Ave., Chicago
120 W. 42nd St., New York—250 Stockton St., San Francisco

Send me your new catalog with illustrations in color and full description of every known musical instrument. Also tell me how I may have any instrument for free trial in my own home, and may pay for it in easy installments. No obligation.

Name ----------

Address ----------

(State instrument in which you are especially interested)

21 Jewel Burlington

Just Out

Latest Designs in Watch Cases beautifully illustrated in our booklet. Send for FREE Copy.

Adjusted to the Second
Adjusted to Temperature
Adjusted to Isochronism
Adjusted to Positions

21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels
25 Year Gold Strata Case
Your Choice of Dials
(Including Montgomery R. R. Dial)
New Ideas in Thin Cases

Only $1.00 Down

Only One Dollar Down will buy this masterpiece of watch manufacture. The balance you are allowed to pay in small, easy, monthly payments. The Burlington — a 21-Jewel Watch — is sold to you at a price much lower than that of other high-grade watches. Besides, you have the selection of the finest thin model designs and latest styles in watch cases. Don't delay! Write for the FREE Watch Book and our SPECIAL OFFER today.

Write While This Special Offer Lasts

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon. Find out about this great special offer which is being made for only a limited time. You will know a great deal more about watch buying when you read this book. You will be able to "steer clear" of the over-priced watches which are no better. Remember, the Burlington is sent to you for only One Dollar down, balance in small monthly payments. Send the coupon for watch book and our special offer TODAY!

Burlington Watch Company
Dept. 1403, 19th St. and Marshall Blvd., Chicago
Canadian Address: 62 Albert St., Winnipeg, Manitoba

Please send me (without obligations and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your $1.00 down offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name ----------

Address ----------

Burlington Watch Company
Dept. 1403, 19th Street and Marshall Blvd., Chicago
Canadian Address: 62 Albert Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba